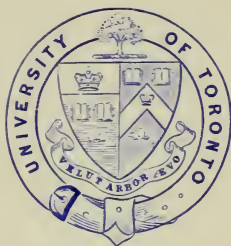


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COBWEBS OF CRITICISM.



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COBWEBS OF CRITICISM.

A REVIEW

OF THE FIRST REVIEWERS OF
THE 'LAKE,' 'SATANIC,' AND 'COCKNEY' SCHOOLS.

BY

(Su) (T.) HALL CAINE.

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LONDON:

ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

1883.

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THE FABLE OF THE CRITICS.

'For is it not, I ask, very unfair, when every trade and profession is allowed its own sport and travesty, not to extend the same permission to literature?'—ERASMUS.

IN the midst of a fair country there stood an exceeding high and holy mountain whereon the sun never set, but parleyed with it through all ages of ages, from the dawn of morning light over the moorlands till the shadows died along them at eve. And on the summit of this great steepness there was a fountain, and the sun and the skies were mirrored in its waters, and he that drank thereof might never die.

And multitudes came from the uttermost parts of the earth to climb the steepness, and drink of the spring and live for ever. Some of them that came were in tattered mantles, and the food whereon they lived was bread and water; and some were in fine raiment and lived sumptuously: but all turned their steps upward to where the mountain kissed the sky.

And in every age the few strong men who adventured so far attained the summit; but the sides of the mountain were hard and rugged and many fell by the way; and where each man fell, there they buried him, and at the foot were the graves of the many who had fallen.

So, for their great truth's sake, fourteen vassals of the people stepped out from the concourse that had gathered together, and cried aloud and said, *For Truth's sake and*

Fame's, shall we be true-men in this combat of mortals with the sacred steepness, and guard the foot thereof; and let no man deceive himself, thinking to gain the summit, if by reason of weakness he may not climb thereto—for we will cut him in pieces if we can, and none shall ask of us wherefore was his death. This, forsooth, they did for the pity that was in them for the multitudes that fell by the way, and for their honouring of the holy hill that was profaned by the graves of the vanquished.

And there was great rejoicing among the people, who straightway fell back seven spears-length, and the true-men divided themselves into two companies, seven to the North and seven to the South, and behold the path of the sun was between them. Each vassal of the two companies made himself at once true-man and guard, judge and combatant, and each bore shield upon arm, laid lance in rest, and laced up his helmet. Each man, also, wore his vizor down, so that none might know with whom he was called to do battle.

Then came great numbers to climb the mountain and drink of the water and live for ever, and every one as he came was challenged of the true-men. And some, when they saw the guard that hedged round the hill, turned about, and, for very fear, fled far away; and some that overcame the guard sank down among the mountain fastnesses, wherefrom their cry was heard in places higher than they could gain. Some by sleight were allowed to go up without combat, whereof it was seen that the most fell backward ere yet they had passed the lowest steps, and thereat the multitude laughed aloud and the true-men tasted of the bitterness of shame.

Now, it chanced on a day that seven strong men came to do their devoir to the true-men and scale the steepness and drink of the fountain and live for ever. The first to come was one who bore nor shield nor lance, and wore nor

helmet nor breastplate ; but about him was wrapped a leathern cloak, and he was a giant in stature. Him the true-men challenged and lifted up their voice and said, Who art thou that comest in thy simple leathern coat to scorn us in thy contempt of mail ? But he that was spoken to answered not again, and went upward with bowed head, oftentimes stopping to pluck a primrose that might grow between stones. Hereupon the true-men, in wrath, charged at him ; but when they came nigh abreast of him, he turned about and looked at them, when suddenly they found awe upon them, for none might gaze on his countenance unmoved. Then one by one they slunk back, and he went on his way, and eftsoons he gained the top.

The second to come was a comely man, right manly in his going ; and when the true-men were brought to speech of him there was quarrelling in their companies, for he had kinsmen in both their camps, and loath were they to do battle with him. But those that knew him not dealt him many back-handed blows, and for every stroke he received he gave two others, and inch by inch he fought his way upward with his face kept steadfastly to the true-men and his back to the summit. And though the guard cut away both coif and laurel in the strife, yet because his kinsmen fought not against him but against their fellows to his behoof, therefore he prevailed and won the heights.

The third to come was a stalwart man and strong, but his face was pale and his eyes were dim with reverie, as if he had seen the meteor of his fancies swim beyond his ken and leave only the cloud-eclipsed stars. Sinewy was he, but his steps were loitering and uneven, and when his foot struck the ridges of the earth, strength went out of him. His eyes were fixed on the mountain whither his way lay, and as he went he sang the soothest song. Him the true-men at the foot of the high mountain followed hard, and they dealt him many a stroke, but it was

with the flat of the sword they struck him, the edge failing them. Then again they dealt him many more, but the strokes were given aslant. And when they perceived that their blows touched him not they were sore dismayed, and turned and fled from him, and he, too, scaled the top.

The fourth to come was a right hardy knight, and the horse he rode was starker than any of the horses of the true-men; and in the skin of the gazelle it was caparisoned, and in shawls wove with gold, so that the glory thereof shone over the field and dazzled the eyes of the beholders; but there was soil upon them, and earth was on his garments. His countenance bewrayed passion, scorn, and desperation, albeit sometimes melancholy also, as if a burden lay close at his heart. And as he rode at speed, dallying meanwhile with the heft of a sabre that was set in coral and pearl, the true-men smote him unaware, and tore away his gorgeous trappings. Then he gnashed his teeth, and turning about smote them again. His breast-plate was three-fold, and when he gave his horse the spur and with arm stretched back lay prone to the saddle-bow and met the shields of the guard, his lance brake in twain; but in his seat he sat firm, and with a two-edged sword he won the field. Then all the people marvelled and shouted aloud that he had conquered, and celebrated his victory with rejoicing. And being now brought to his feet, the vassals with supple knees and fawningly made shew to attend him as far up the mountain as they could toil, but straightway he turned his horse's head upward, and rode so fast over bush and brake that when he reached the topmost stones the horse fell dead beneath him.

The fifth to come was one who wore a wreath of hawthorn around his head, and seemed much to doubt his enterprise, as though to think happy man were he who-

soever had never attempted so much. But the companies of the true-men were again divided, for he, likewise, had kinsmen among them; and while they quarrelled he stole in between them, yet whether he gained the summit or fell short thereof none could rightly say.

The sixth to come was like unto a drooping flower, or a spirit among men that went in and out none knew how. He, too, sang a song, whereof no man could say certainly whether it were his or the lark's. He went forward with a wand in his hand, but no helmet was on his head, and over his heart no breast-plate. One blow from the true-men he received, and it went in about the third rib, near the heart, and for awhile he fainted; but presently recovering himself he stood up and turned his eyes wistfully to the path, and in a moment disappearing was lost in a thicket, and was seen again of none till he came forth at the top.

The last to come was a well-favoured youth, and he had the sun on his face, and his eyes were bright as of one who sees a vision, yea, the fiery pillar of hope before him. On a swift charger was he mounted, and he rode as fearing no let, neither seeing any foeman that fell not beneath his shield. Then with one accord the true-men who did guard the great steepness at the top whereof is the spring at which whoso drinks lives for ever, fell upon the youth, him of the lightsome countenance, and ere he had passed above two spears-length they struck him on every side. And the wounds they gave him were mortal, and their lances came forth red. Then did the girth of his horse burst asunder, and with the saddle he was torn from his seat and fell heavily to the ground. And all the people thought he was stricken unto death, and they lifted up their voices against the true-men for that they had done this deed. But he arose with many wounds, and went steadfastly sunward, though the stones of his path were stained with the

blood that did gush from him. And when he had toiled sorely to that height to which no true-man might ever ascend, his sandals (the latchets whereof were broken in the combat) slipped away from under him, and with bare feet that did bleed he clomb the jagged stones. When nigh the top, footsore and faint, the one who went before (he who was like unto a flower swayed by the wind and who sang as the lark) bent down and bore him up, and ran to the spring, and, touching his lips, offered him to drink, and laved his hectic cheek. But he was too far spent, and swooned and died; and they buried him upon the summit of the mountain, at the foot of the great stone that stands by the brink of Castaly. And when they had written his name on the stone above him, behold the waters of the spring rose up higher and did cover it; and his peers read the name therein, and said, 'Lo, it is indeed writ in water!' Thus did he live and yet die, so that they who dwelt on the heights for ever both had him with them and had him not, and said among themselves that by the rumour of the living waters he was gone farther than all they.

And for their vain endeavours to keep down the seven strong men from the mountain whereunto they would go, all the people laughed long at the true-men, and cried aloud in wrath against them, thinking to overwhelm them with tumult; and presently they were seen no more. Some say they fought one with the other till all fell dead together, and some that they followed the strong men up the hard mountain, but slipped their feet in its ridges and rolled with one accord to the bottom thereof, and were there buried. And it came to pass that the multitude of the people called the name of that place, *The Valley of Dry Bones*, saying, 'The gods having delivered us.'

END OF FABLE.



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INTRODUCTION.

A JOINT creative and critical era is almost an unexampled thing in the history of letters ; yet a time of twofold literary activity began in England in the first years of this century. Such a period of creative activity had not been known in England for two hundred years ; and the critical activity of the period was hardly less ardent. In 1800, the *Gentleman's Magazine* had been going nearly seventy years, the *Monthly Review* fifty years, the *European Magazine* eighteen years, the *Monthly Mirror* and the *Monthly Magazine* four years. But these publications were chiefly literary miscellanies, and it was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that the periodical press began first to assume the duty of guiding public opinion in the formation of principles of judgment in literature. The *Edinburgh Review* appeared first in 1802, and was followed by the

Examiner in 1808, the *Quarterly Review* in 1809, the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1814, and the *Edinburgh Monthly* (afterwards, as now, called *Blackwood's Magazine*) in 1817. Did this great critical movement signalise 'a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that was known and thought in the world,' or did it indicate the growth of the more aggressive spirit to which the motto chosen by the first Edinburgh Reviewers gave emphatic expression : 'The judge is condemned when the guilty man is absolved or escapes condemnation'? The latter mainly, we may think.

An era of criticism succeeding an era of creative activity is usually characterised by wisdom, or at least, sanity ; an era of criticism preceding a creative era is generally free from glaring errors of anticipation ; but an era of criticism cannot, it would seem, coexist with an era of creative impulse and energy without witnessing ludicrous and painful mistakes. Some examples of errors of judgment made during the first quarter of the century are here collected and collated ; and it is the purpose of the book to present them in a form suitable for the use of those who have little leisure to spend in the perusal of the many volumes of forgotten magazines from whose superannuated pages they have been extracted. In these

excerpts it will be seen in what esteem Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Keats, Shelley, Byron and Hunt were held by the professional critics of their age, and what grossly erroneous abridgments of the judgment of time were first pronounced by those whose business it was to anticipate the popular voice.

The author has attempted to traverse the whole body of the criticism published during the first quarter of the century on the great poets of the second poetic period in our literature. He does not expect that the public will be surprised at the bitterness of the adverse tone usually adopted in the articles from which he has quoted. Most readers are conscious of the asperity of the criticism at first directed against the poets of what were styled the 'Lake,' the 'Satanic,' and the 'Cockney' schools. The ungenerous personal attacks, of which we all know something, were in the main due to the humiliating, the scarcely explicable, the all but insurmountable fact of literary envy and malice, and at this fact we have long ceased to marvel. But the author thinks it will be found instructive to observe, by contrast of the extracts he has set side by side, how hard it always is to the critical intelligence to judge of a work independently of accepted canons of taste, and how painfully in every age it toils after the creative instinct into those unbeaten paths which

genius delights to open up. If it were possible to place over against the critical anomalies here unearthed, the many sonorous puffs printed month after month side by side with them, on indifferent writers in prose and verse long since forgotten, we would almost begin to question the value and function of criticism. But 'no ashes are lighter than those of incense, and few things burn out sooner.' A search through the pages of forgotten periodicals affords a glimpse of the philosophy of life so broad and far-reaching that it is doubtful if any abstract teaching can quite match it. One thinks one sees with a vividness not less than startling that the writer who would win the applause of his contemporaries must often put by all hope of gaining that of their successors; that he who labours for ultimate great ends must be willing to forego immediate rewards; that he whose life is as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, must not expect to escape calumny. On the other hand, one thinks one sees that honest work pursued steadfastly, patiently, loyally, year after year, through evil report and good, must one day work its way to that rank which Time itself reserves for its best.

The author trusts he has not been betrayed into any undue exhibition of feeling in quoting these anomalies. As a critic he is naturally not without a proper regard

for criticism as an auxiliary to creative activity. He recognises to the full how hard it is to anticipate in the present the judgment of the future, and to appear at once to lead the flocks like the Eastern shepherd, and to follow them like the shepherd of the West. It is no easy task to note the indications, often so elusive, of those changes in the current of thought and feeling by which the whole stream of the intellectual life of a people is turned aside. There is a criticism that may keep pace with creative activity, but it is not the cold, sinister, suspicious criticism of which examples are here furnished. It is the criticism that is itself creative, the criticism of which we rejoice to see certain of the best fruits in our own time, the criticism that was in the mind of F. D. Maurice (himself an admirable critic), when he wrote :

‘ The main use of criticism is to recover the illustrious men, whom God has given us, from the misrepresentation of opponents who hated them, and of admirers who did not understand them. . . . The true critical discernment which separates that which is capricious and transitory from that which abides, that which belongs to all from that which may be the rightful and proper inheritance of some here and some there, must make everyone richer. That criticism which distinguishes the substance and the shadow, the

reality and its counterfeit, must bring us into nearer connection with truth, and therefore with freedom.'

The author made choice of the years 1800-25, because they cover the period he knew best; because from lifelong familiarity with the facts as well as the fruits of the neo-romantic movement in English poetry he was able to traverse the periodical literature contemporary with it with some sense of command, perceiving at once where the critics were in the right, and putting a finger readily enough, and without necessity for reference, upon a lie. Fortunately, however, the period that suited him best, suited best with his subject. For three reasons that period appears to be the only one capable of illustrating with any degree of completeness the main theory of this book.

First, because periodical literature, so far as it concerns criticism as a distinct vocation, really began with the present century. Criticism in Shakespeare's day must have been in great part an unknown quantity, though Greene has left us his 'Groatsworth,' and Ben Jonson his colloquies with Drummond. In Pope's day, and later, it was confined to the pamphleteering of the Dennises, Ralphs, and Kenricks. In Fielding's day it took sometimes a less fugitive shape, if we may judge of its character from the prefatory chapters to his books. But not yet had literary criticism become in any sense

a profession, though political criticism had done so, mainly, no doubt, by the instrumentality of the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Monthly Review*. It was therefore at the beginning of the nineteenth century that English critical literature, properly so called, began.

Second, because the critical activity in question was, as we say, called into existence by the creative activity that immediately preceded it and co-existed with it; but no two things could have been more dissimilar in the temper inspiring them, and therefore no two things could have been more likely to come into immediate conflict. Criticism must, in the nature of things, lag behind creation—it usually establishes its tenets on the accepted doctrines of the period anterior to it. Creative effort is linked in no such palpable way with the past. It may break entirely with the canons of art that preceded it; but when it does so, there inevitably ensues a struggle with criticism, which at once makes attempt to bind it down to the conditions of whatever law Time seems to have ratified. This was the character of the war that took place in the first years of the century. The neo-romantic movement had two leading purposes. First, to substitute for the 'prose temper' of the poetry of Pope, the romantic temper of the poetry of Coleridge. Next, to substitute

for Pope's highly artificial diction, Cowper's natural language. Now, these were purposes that must have come into collision with the critical intelligence that had been led by education to believe that what has been called Pope's 'materialism' was the proper basis of poetry, and that his diction (probably for the reason that it differed from the language of life) was the only thing we could call poetic.

Third, because the criticism of 1800-25 rested on the assumption that it was the proper business of criticism not so much to display characteristic excellences as to detect imperfections—to play, in short, the judge's part in condemning, or, say, the police-sergeant's part in apprehending, literary defaulters. This view of the functions of criticism accounts in itself for much of the acerbity which is displayed in certain extracts found in the following pages.

Most of these causes of conflict have happily long ceased to operate, yet it can hardly be said that errors of judgment equally egregious are not still made by the professed guides to literature. Rancorous abuse is not now the dominant tone of critical literature, and that fact can involve a loss only to the charlatan to whom reputation is mere noise, to whom silence is death, and whose name, like a shuttlecock, 'must be beat back and forward, or it falls to the

ground.' Perhaps the tendency of criticism in our day is to be somewhat too mincing in tone. There seems to be a good deal of disposition towards universal applause and towards an elaborate veiling of adverse opinion behind effeminate phrases. Not that uncharitableness is now less than heretofore the constitutional weakness of the critical temperament ; there are always plenty of people ready to travel from Dan to Beersheba, and cry out at every inch of the way, ' All is barren ! ' Not that the fibreless phrase of much modern criticism denotes an altered attitude of mind towards literary defects ; stripped of the outward decorum with which it is veneered, the gentle softnesses of playful ridicule or banter which usually characterise current periodical literature will doubtless often be found to consist (just as much as the unmeasured abuse of former days) of the mean materials of envy and malice. Not that universal applause—now or ever—is free from L'Estrange's charge of being ' seldom less than two-thirds of a scandal ; ' behind the appearance of friendliness lies sometimes all the rottenness of that disloyalty which is peculiar to coteries, and which is suppressed by mutual agreement, and because it is policy to have at least a surface understanding for the display of a verbal admiration that is expected to be reciprocal. And so, notwith-

standing our refinement of *manners* in criticism, it is doubtful if our *morals* in criticism are much improved since the days when those diatribes were written, which it has become the business of the writer of this book to review.

For good or ill, however, criticism is less powerful now than it was eighty years ago. To reverse a formula of Joubert's, the period here treated of was one in which criticism acted (or made pretence to act) upon the world ; now the world acts on criticism. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of literary guides—perhaps by reason of their great number and the consequent clashing of their opinions—criticism seems to lose ground in England, and to look more than ever to the popular judgment to give hint as to the way it should go. Critics can still make people buy books, but they can neither make them read nor applaud them—as one man may lead a horse to water, though twenty cannot make him drink.

This volume is called COBWEBS OF CRITICISM as symbolical of those exudations that cling about dark places and are swept away when the air and the light of day are cast upon them.

‘THE LAKE SCHOOL.’



WORDSWORTH.

COLERIDGE said the representative creative work of the last half of the eighteenth century was pseudo-poetic, and it must be added that the representative critical work of that period was pseudo-critical. The *Monthly Review* had in the main been engaged, since its origin in 1749, in deifying the remnants of scholasticism, and in expelling mysticism from religion. The *Town and Country Magazine* and the *Gentleman's Magazine* were miscellanies discharging the functions proper to second-rate magazines of our own time. The *European Magazine* was too often devoted to the glorification of soldiers and such-like substantial heroes; and the *Monthly Mirror*, a theatrical organ, to the apotheosis of the tangible heroes of the stage. The *Monthly Magazine*, to which Coleridge contributed fugitive pieces, had scarcely begun. On the whole, it may without serious injustice be said that the periodical press was barren to the point of sterility. With the dawn of the creative era, signalled by the triumvirate of Lake poets, began a period of extra-

ordinary critical activity. Of this, the earliest phenomena were manifest beyond the Tweed. In 1802, the *Edinburgh Review* was started. Its founders were a handful of gifted young men, of whom some had scarcely attained their majority, and none had passed their early manhood. They recognised at the outset the hard etymological significance of the word *criticism*. The preface to their first issue will repay perusal.

‘The editors think it will be easily perceived that it forms no part of their object to notice every publication that issues from the press. . . . Of the books that are daily presented to the world, a very large proportion is evidently destined to obscurity by the insignificance of their subjects or the defects of their execution. A review of such productions, like a biography of private individuals, could afford gratification only to the partiality of friends or the malignity of enemies.’

These are sensible words beyond doubt, read in dry light ; and it will be painful indeed if it appear that in no single year of its first decade did the review started under such auspices escape the odium of both flattery and malignancy, or the questionable distinction of glorifying dubious talent and neglecting manifest genius. It can hardly be said that the *Edinburgh Review* started well. Let us remember what lasting works were published about the date of its first issue, and then glance down the table of contents. Chatterton’s ‘Remains,’ edited by Southey, appeared in Bristol in the year of this first issue, but no review of that poet finds a place in these pages.* There is a disquisition on ‘the causes and effects’ of an astonishing tide of ‘Emigration from the Highlands of Scotland ;’ there had been a more astonishing emigration

* A notice of the ‘Remains’ appears in a later volume.

from Brooke Street, Holborn, of which nothing is said. Schiller's 'Wallenstein,' translated by Coleridge, had been published in 1800; but in place of any mention of that work, readers are given an essay on 'The Utility of County Banks.' The 'Lyrical Ballads' had appeared in a double series in 1798 and 1800, but such poetry as 'The Ancient Mariner' had to make way for Dr. Parr's 'Spital Sermons,' and Wood's 'Optics.' Wordsworth's book, 'Descriptive Sketches,' was issued in 1793; and though that was nine years earlier than the date of this issue, we might reasonably look for a notice of it here, for the reviewers were avowedly superior to the newsman's craving for early intelligence, having said:

'As the value of a publication conducted upon this principle will not depend very materially upon the earliness of its intelligence, they (the editors) have been induced to prefer a quarterly to a monthly period of publication.'

But no; Southey's 'Thalaba' alone, of the really important books of the year, appears to have been found on that level of poetic importance which removed all notice of it, in the pages of the new critical organ, from suspicion of partiality or malevolence.

The article in the first issue of the *Edinburgh Review*, purporting to be a criticism of 'Thalaba,' was in the main a declaration of war against the school of poetry of which Southey was understood to be a faithful disciple, and to the glory of which he had, according to the new authority, sacrificed greater talents and acquisitions than could be boasted of by any of his associates. This is how the article begins:

‘Poetry has this much, at least, in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago, by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question.’

It will be agreed that the temper of such criticism hardly seems promising of any just or even tolerant estimate of poets who made deliberate revolt against the previously received canons of judgment in poetry. The next passage is yet more emphatic, for therein we are told that poetry and religion have this also in common—

‘That many profess to be entirely devoted to it, who have no *good works* to produce in support of their pretensions. The Catholic poetical church, too, has worked but few miracles since the first ages of its establishment; has been more prolific, for a long time, of doctors than of saints; it has had its corruptions and reformatations also, and has given birth to an infinite variety of heresies and errors, the followers of which have hated and persecuted each other as cordially as bigots.’

Here, then, at the outset was no uncertain sound; and the parallel made of the reference to *good works* is significant as showing the disposition in which the northern writers approached the poetry of the time.

One remembers what Keats said on the good and ill done by the Kirk-men of Scotland, and one wonders what the ‘little pagan, five feet high’ would have thought of such a trespass of sectarianism as the above passage involves on the domain proper to poetry. ‘These Kirk-men,’ said Keats, ‘have done Scotland good. They have made men, women; old men, young men; old women, young women; boys, girls and all infants—careful; so that they are formed into regular phalanxes of savers and gainers. . . . These

Kirk-men have done Scotland harm ; they have banished puns, love, and laughing.' It is certain that the author of 'Endymion' would have denied to such a national temperament as is indicated in the foregoing extracts, the possibility of its ever producing a poet. 'Think,' he says, 'of the fate of Burns : poor, unfortunate fellow ! his disposition *was Southern*. . . His misery is a dead-weight upon the nimbleness of one's quill. . . . How sad it is when a luxurious imagination is obliged, in self-defence, to deaden its delicacy in vulgarity and in things attainable, that it may not have leisure to go mad after things that are not !' But there is more of the Kirk-men kind to follow.

'The author who is now before us belongs to a *sect* of poets that has established itself in this country within these ten or twelve years, and is looked upon, we believe, as one of its chief champions and apostles. The peculiar doctrines of this sect, it would not, perhaps, be very easy to explain ; but, that they are *dissenters* from the established systems in poetry and criticism is admitted, and proved indeed by the whole tenor of their compositions. Though they lay claim, we believe, to a creed and a revelation of their own, there can be little doubt that their doctrines are of German origin.'

After remarking that the disciples of this school boast much of its originality, and seem to value themselves very highly for having broken loose from the bondage of ancient authority and reasserted the independence of genius, the *Edinburgh* continues :

'Originality, however, we are persuaded is rarer than mere alteration, and a man may change a good master for a bad one without finding himself at all nearer to independence. . . . The productions of this school, we conceive, are so far from being entitled to the praise of originality that they cannot be

better characterized than by an enumeration of the sources from which their materials have been derived.'

Then follows a statement of the factors in the formation of the new school of poetry, which will be seen to be on the whole about as conclusive as Thomas Rymer's celebrated statement of the moral uses of Shakspeare's 'Othello.' 'The moral use of this fable,' says Rymer, 'is very instructive. First, it may be a caution to all maidens of quality, how, without their parents' consent, they run away with blackamoors. Secondly, it may be a warning to all good wives that they look well to their linen.' (Here is, of course, a contemptuous allusion to the fatal handkerchief.) 'And thirdly, it may be a lesson to husbands that before their jealousy be tragical the proof may be mathematical.' This analytical marvel of criticism appears in Rymer's 'Short View of Tragedy,' which, surely, might have been with advantage by its short length yet shorter. The sources from which the Lake School derived their materials are said to have been

'1. The antisocial principles and distempered sensibility of Rousseau—his discontent with the present constitution of society—his paradoxical morality, and his perpetual hankering after some unattainable state of voluptuous virtue and perfection.

'2. The simplicity and energy (*horresco referens*) of Kotzebue and Schiller.

'3. The homeliness and harshness of some of Cowper's language and versification, interchanged occasionally with the *innocence* of Ambrose Phillips, or the quaintness of Quarles and Dr. Donne.'

The *Edinburgh* reviewers loved to feel the firm

ground beneath their feet, but from their concrete standpoint they must have forgotten, when penning the above, that Rousseau, Ambrose Phillips, Quarles and Donne could scarcely furnish the German origin from which the doctrines of the new school were said to be derived. The statement of derivative sources was, however, considered conclusive, and the public were assured that from the diligent study of these few originals an entire art of poetry might be collected, by the assistance of which the *gentlest* of readers might soon be qualified 'to compose a poem as correctly versified as 'Thalaba,' and to deal out sentiment and description with all the sweetness of Lambe (*sic*), and all the magnificence of Coleridge.' The cut at the simplicity of Lamb which lurked behind the reference to the *gentlest* of readers was obviously too subtly destructive not to be followed up with renewed energy.

'Their most distinguishing symbol is undoubtedly an affectation of great simplicity and familiarity of language. They disdain to make use of the common poetic phraseology, or to ennoble their diction by a selection of fine or dignified expressions. There would be too much *art* in this. . . . We may excuse a certain homeliness of language in the productions of a ploughman, or a milkwoman; but we cannot bring ourselves to admire it in an author who has had occasion to indite odes to his college bell and inscribe hymns to the Penates.'

After admitting, with amiable condescension, that there may, possibly, be a class of persons (the *Edinburgh* is afraid they cannot be called *readers*) to whom the representation of vulgar manners, in vulgar language, will afford pleasure, the reviewers continue:

'Now this style' (the representative style of the new school in general, and that of 'Thalaba' in particular) 'we conceive possesses no one character of excellence ; it is feeble, low, and disjointed ; without elegance, and without dignity ; the offspring we should imagine of mere ignorance and neglect, or the unhappy fruit of a system that would teach us to undervalue that vigilance and labour which sustained the loftiness of Milton, and gave energy and direction to the pointed and fine propriety of Pope.'

Time was when Milton himself, whose name is here employed to display a transfiguring contrast between feebleness and vigilance, was liable to criticism not less damaging. Of his 'Paradise Lost' it was remarked in the poet's own age, that the 'blind schoolmaster' had written a poem whereof the only notable characteristics were dreariness and length. But Milton had in 1800 long lived down all illiterate abuse, and it may fairly be presumed that in the view of the young northern critics, at all events, he had taken his final place among those 'inspired writers whose authority,' to use their own phrase, 'it was no longer lawful to call in question.' The most Miltonic poet since Milton, however, was not yet safe from the self-elected judges who found thoughtless ridicule of a contemporary more attractive than a just estimate of his excellences and defects.

We might find specimens in abundance of the continued cannonading against a school of poetry of which one disciple, Coleridge, said the only thing its leaders claimed in common was good sense, confirmed by imitation of the long-established models of the best times of Greece, Rome, Italy and England. It cannot but prove a pure gain to hold constantly the torch of a salutary warning over the gulf of all that

omnivorous egotism in which the early critics of certain great poets were swallowed up.

Of Wordsworth's work it may confidently be said that outside the pages of the 'Biographia Literaria,' no fair and philosophical inquisition into its merits was made in the author's early days—none perhaps in which either the premises were not palpably irrational and the deductions illegitimate, or the keenness and asperity of the damnatory style employed were not such as to excite suspicion of the criminal intrusion of personal insult. Quarter after quarter, month after month, week after week, Wordsworth was, for many years, arraigned with a malignity which no diversity of poetic taste could explain; and which could only be grounded on the distempered state of the moral associations of his critics. Let us glance at the actual text of a few of the articles of which we have all heard much.

The earliest notice of Wordsworth which we can find appears in the *Monthly Review* for 1793, and concerns his first book, 'Descriptive Sketches.' Of this work Coleridge says: 'Seldom, if ever, was the emergence of an original poetic genius above the literary horizon more evidently announced;' yet this is how the critics of the time began an unprovoked hostility which may be said to have ended only with the death of the poet:

'More descriptive poetry! Have we not yet enough? Must eternal changes be rung on upland and lowland, and nodding forests and brooding clouds, and cells, and dells, and dingles. Yes; more and yet more: so it is decreed.'

After quoting the lines in which appears the couplet :

‘ Where falls the purple morning far and wide
In flakes of light upon the mountain-side,’

the reviewer remarks that he is ‘ sorry to see the purple morning confined so like a maniac in a strait-waist-coat !’ The notice concludes with a pathetic appeal to authors to spare the weary pen the iteration of so much wisdom as had fallen from it so frequently in a vain endeavour to make men believe that the first business of a poet is to know what, ‘ in the name of God or Beelzebub,’ he is ‘ driving at.’

‘ How often shall we in vain advise those, who are so delighted with their own thoughts that they cannot forbear from putting them into rhyme, to examine those thoughts till they themselves understand them ? No man will ever be a poet till his mind be sufficiently powerful to sustain this labour.’

It is amusing to wonder what form of supernatural suicide the wraith of the man who wrote this critique would devise if he were to arise in our day, and witness the homage paid to the great poet to whose early muse he offered such presumptuous insult.

The ‘ Lyrical Ballads,’ in two volumes (1800), appear to have been, at the first, in some respects successful with the public and with the lesser periodical press ; but the more notable quarterly and monthly publications were silent with respect to them—pursuant, it may be presumed, of the scheme which the foremost of those journals claimed to have originated, of reviewing those books only which were susceptible or deserving of argumentative criticism. Instead, however, of leaving such

trash as they affected to believe these books to be, to sink into oblivion by their own weight, they snarled at them often and long, under the cover of works said to be more meritorious. Speaking, in that review of 'Thalaba' (1802) from which passages are already quoted, of the alleged representation by the Lake School of vulgar manners in vulgar language, the commander-in-chief of the critical onslaught writes :

'He (Southey) appears to us to be less addicted to this fault than most of his fraternity; and if we were in want of examples to illustrate the preceding observations, we should certainly look for them in the effusions of that poet who commemorates with so much effect the chattering of Harry Gibbs' teeth, tells the tale of the one-eyed huntsman who had "a cheek like a cherry," and beautifully warns his studious friend of the risk he ran of "growing double."'

The foregoing passage is of interest, as affording a clue to the reviewer's method of criticism. It is clear, by his own showing, that the justice of the sentence pronounced upon the poem is not made certain to the critic's mind by the faultiness of the passages extracted, which are merely chosen to support a verdict, the general grounds for which have been previously conceived without reference to them. In other words, it is obvious that the critic first attributed qualities to the poem, and then pronounced judgment upon it before he had read it page after page, perhaps before he had read it at all, and afterwards, as was admitted, pricked with a pin for passages wherewith to illustrate his opinions. This method of review is about as humiliating to our sense of the nobility of the practice and proper functions of criticism as it would be to our

love of political purity to be compelled to conclude that Junius first forged his impeachments of ministerial corruption without reference to the crimes of any special offender, and then glanced along the treasury bench in order to alight upon a man who would suit well with the general lines of his preconceived satanic portraiture. What should we say of the invisible knight who there, in those political lists, wore his visor down, if we had it on his own clear showing that by such method as is here indicated he prepared his tirade against Lord Rockingham, or his yet more lasting panegyric on Lord Chatham? For with just such damnatory sentence as we would visit upon him, should we brand for ever the critic who, with face equally hidden and a mock device of justice on his shield, poised his lance in this *Edinburgh Review* with even greater skill.

Little wonder that such thrusts in the dark as are directed against Wordsworth in the foregoing passage should meet with protest. We know that followers of the poet wrote repeatedly in remonstrance, and it was doubtless in allusion to some outburst of indignation that the editors affixed this footnote to a subsequent issue : 'We have no desire to display our powers of repartee in a public disputation with anonymous correspondents.' This repudiation of any right to a rejoinder on the part of the persons aggrieved brings to mind a similar but more amusing piece of tyranny by an Oriental professor of the bastinado, who, during an attempt to extort, by forcible arguments, a full confession from a culprit,

was interrupted by his outcry of pain. 'This is a mere digression,' said the stern wielder of the bastinado. 'All this noise, sir, is nothing to the point; your howls are no answer to my question!' 'Ah! but,' replied the sufferer, 'they are the most pertinent reply in nature to your blows.'

Criticism soon became weary of a conscious effort to ignore a poet whose name was yearly rising to established rank, and then it first took that tone which silence finds always most germane to it—banter.

In 1807, Wordsworth published his 'Poems' in two volumes. The *Monthly Review* (following up the spirit of its reproof offered thirteen years previously) noticed the work adversely; but to the *Edinburgh* (1807) was reserved the poor glory of reviewing it with equal paltry conceit and lampoon.

After observing that the author is known to belong to a certain brotherhood of 'whining and hypochondriacal poets' who have 'haunted for some years about the lakes of Cumberland,' the reviewers go on to say that there were times and moods in which they were led to suspect themselves of unjustifiable severity in their dealings with these poets; but the volume before them has freed them from all regret that they declared themselves against the school it represents with prompt and emphatic hostility. Indeed, this book has brought the matter to 'a test which must,' they say, 'be convincing even to the author himself.' Then comes the following:

‘Mr. Wordsworth’s diction has nowhere any pretensions to elegance or dignity ; and he has scarcely ever condescended to give grace or correctness or melody to his versification.’

If the style of Wordsworth were merely ‘slovenly and neglectful,’ however, the *Edinburgh* thinks it might be endured, but it remains no longer tolerable to christian, pagan, or man, when it comes coupled with the ‘poor ambition of originality,’ and a jibbering disposition to ‘break into ecstasies about spades, or sparrow’s eggs, or men gathering leeches, or women in duffel cloaks, or plates, or porringers, or washing-tubs.’ The review continues :

‘All the world laughs at elegiac stanzas to a sucking-pig—a hymn on washing-day—sonnets to one’s grandmother, or Pindarics on gooseberry-pie ; and yet we are afraid it will not be quite easy to convince Mr. Wordsworth that the same ridicule must infallibly attach to the pathetic pieces in this volume.’

After this preliminary stroke of humour, the reviewer proceeds to deal in detail with the several contents of the volume.

‘The “Redbreast and the Butterfly” is, it must be confessed, “silly sooth” in good earnest. The three last lines seem to be downright raving. We have a piece of namby-pamby “To the Small Celandine.” . . . The next piece, entitled “The Beggars,” may be taken as a touchstone of Mr. Wordsworth’s merit. . . . To us, we will confess, it appears to be a very paragon of silliness and affectation. . . . If the printing of such trash as “Alice Fell” be not felt as an insult on public taste, we are afraid it cannot be insulted. . . . The next is a very tedious, affected performance called “Yarrow Unvisited.” . . . We have a rapturous mythical “Ode to the Cuckoo,” in which the author, striving after force and originality, produces nothing but absurdity.’

It is hard, without tangible evidence, to believe

that anything so wanting in psychical insight can have been written about the rarely beautiful poem in which occur the lines :

‘ O cuckoo ! shall I call thee bird,
Or but a wandering voice ?’

We have heard the Lake School charged, by these critics, with deriving inspiration from German sources ; but surely the German mind, with its great love of the world of actualities, and its constant striving to keep close to the ground, has never produced, even in the more spiritual moods of Goethe, any such purely imaginative fantasy as is here presented in the idea of a wandering, disembodied voice. Wordsworth’s work has the same feeling elsewhere, and Shelley’s poetry is drenched in the dew of a similar spirit ; but the reach of imagination which therein both poets compass is of course too distant and too subtle to abide (as Jeremy Taylor says, in a like connection) the decision, whether it be true or false, of him that reads in the spirit of ridicule, or of him that reads after dinner.

It is yet more difficult to believe that the great ‘ Ode on Intimations of Immortality ’ can ever have wanted worshippers. The unique homage with which Coleridge regarded it seems to us now to have been no more than was due to that greatest of all Wordsworth’s great things. It is, however, open to question if a truly original poem ever obtains both adequate and immediate recognition. Byron held a contrary opinion, but perhaps the electrical response to his own work was father to his judgment in this particular.

Perhaps, too, it is true, as Wordsworth himself said, that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great and original, 'must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished—must teach the art by which he is to be seen.' Certain it is that much true poetry, ultimately and finally seen to be good and noble, obtained at first but scant acknowledgment of its worth. Rarely, however, can it have fallen to the lot of any poem to encounter so much insensate opposition as at the outset became all but the sole share of the 'Ode on Immortality,' every line of which is now valuable in all eyes. This is how our golden idol turned to clay in the hands of the *Edinburgh Review*:

'The volume is wound up with an "Ode" with no other title but the motto *Paulo Majora Canamus*. This is, beyond doubt, the most illegible and unintelligible part of the publication. We can pretend to give no analysis or explanation of it; our readers must make what they can of the following extracts.'

Then follows that noblest passage of the poem, beginning,

'O joy! that in our embers;'

and ending,

'And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.'

The reviewer proceeds to say that he has gone through this publication with a view to enable readers to determine whether the author of the verses he has exhibited is entitled to claim the honour of an improver of our poetry, or to found a new school to supersede or new-model all our maxims on the subject. With the following remarks the review concludes:

'We venture to hope that there is now an end of this folly, and that, like other follies, it will be found to have cured itself by the very extravagances resulting from its unbridled indulgence. . . . We think there is every reason to hope that the lamentable consequences which have resulted from Mr. Wordsworth's open violation of the established laws of poetry will operate as a wholesome warning to those who might otherwise have been seduced by his example, and be the means of restoring to that ancient and venerable code its due honour and authority.'

As one reads this expression of a sage hope that there is now an end of the folly of writing as Wordsworth wrote, one remembers another hope equally sage, and equally destined to unlooked-for disappointment—that of Madame De Sévigné, who observed of Racine that as the taste for his works had come in with the rage for coffee, so she hoped with the rage for coffee would the taste disappear.

Due no doubt to such assaults as this one of the *Edinburgh*, the 'Poems,' at first fairly prosperous, finally fell flat in the market; and when Joseph Cottle made over his business at Bristol to Longman of London, the copyright of the 'Lyrical Ballads' was set down in the inventory at *nil*, and was afterwards given back to the author. Quite remorselessly, however, did the young critics follow up their advantage. When opportunity of direct onslaught did not offer, the occasion to review contemporary poetry was used as a means of attack. A review of Crabbe's 'Poems' (1808) presented a channel of assault. Few men to-day would be daring enough to couple Crabbe's name with Wordsworth's in any computation of poetic importance; but the *Edinburgh* said there was 'a misguided fraternity of writers (the Wordsworths, the Southseys,

and the Coleridges), from whose works those of Mr. Crabbe might receive all that elucidation which results from contrast.' Then one by one the characters of Crabbe's somewhat weary and forgotten 'Tales' are set over in glowing advantage against the characters touched by the hand of Wordsworth. The passage in which this is done is too amusing to be omitted.

'Mr. Wordsworth has a village schoolmaster also . . . but the grey-haired rustic pedagogue is represented as a sort of half-crazy, sentimental person, overrun with *fine feelings*, constitutional merriment and a most humorous melancholy.'

The reviewer has obviously forgotten his charge against the Lake School of presenting vulgar manners in vulgar language.

'Mr. Wordsworth has written more than 300 lines on a frail damsel (a character common enough in all poems), but instead of new images of tenderness, or delicate representations of intelligible feelings, he has contrived to tell us nothing whatever about the unfortunate fair one but that her name is Martha Ray; and that she goes up to the top of a hill, in a red cloak, and cries, "O misery!" The rest of the poem is filled with a description of an old thorn and a pond, and of the silly stories which the neighbouring old women told about them . . .

'The sports of childhood and the untimely death of promising youth is (*sic*) also a common topic of poetry. Mr. Wordsworth has some blankverse about it, but all he is pleased to communicate of the rustic child is that he used to amuse himself with shouting to the owls and hearing them answer; . . . for the sake of this one accomplishment, we are told that the author has frequently stood mute and gazed on his grave for half an hour together. . . .

'Love and the fantasies of lovers have afforded an ample theme to poets of all ages. Mr. Wordsworth, however, has thought fit to compose a piece, illustrating this subject by one single thought. A lover trots away to see his mistress one fine evening, staring all the way at the moon; when he gets to her door—

‘“ O mercy ! to myself I cried,
If Lucy should be dead !”

And there the poem ends.’

Of course Wordsworth’s well-known preface greatly offends the reviewer, who says that to make such a preliminary announcement as the poet makes, is as ludicrous

‘—as it would be in the author of an ode or an epic to say, “ Of this piece the reader will necessarily form a very erroneous judgment unless he is apprised that it was written by a pale man in a green coat—sitting cross-legged on an oaken stool—with a scratch on his nose, and a spelling dictionary on the table.” ’

From such childish and absurd affectations as are herein indicated, any reader of candour and discernment will, the reviewer thinks, turn with delight to the poetry of Mr. Crabbe.

In 1819 and again in 1820 (on both occasions under some colourable pretext), the *Edinburgh* continues the attack. The ‘Rejected Addresses’ had appeared in 1812, and in a review of the book, the lines satirical of Wordsworth are quoted and pronounced by ‘no means a parody, but a fair, indeed flattering imitation.’ That ‘flattering imitation’ (probably of ‘Alice Fell’) runs as follows :

‘ My brother Jack was nine in May,
And I was eight on New Year’s day ;
So in Kate Wilson’s shop
Papa (he’s my papa and Jack’s)
Bought me last week a doll of wax,
And brother Jack a top.

‘ Jack’s in the pouts, and this it is,
He thinks mine came to more than his ;
So to my drawer he goes,

Takes out the doll, and O my stars !
He pokes her head between the bars,
And melts off half her nose !'

Everyone knows that if he go to Wordsworth (or indeed to any author whose choice of subject is less homely) to discover passages that can be turned into ridicule, abundant material can readily be found ; but surely parody is one of the lowest forms of criticism, and the gift which the street arabs possess of broad mimicry (or even the appreciation of it) ought scarcely to have come within the accomplishments of a quarterly review which began by disclaiming so many small vices.

When the 'Excursion' was published, in 1814, the *Monthly Review* criticized it adversely. The *Monthly Magazine*, on the other hand, said it was the best poem of the age, and hazarded the questionable statement that no one could lay it down without reading it through. The *European Magazine* was friendly in tone, and the *British Critic* was defensive of the author.

With the substance of Jeffrey's celebrated review, beginning 'This will never do,' most readers are familiar. We can therefore content ourselves with a single extract :

'It bears, no doubt, the stamp of the author's heart and fancy, but unfortunately not half so visibly as that of his peculiar system. . . . It is longer, weaker, and tamer than any of Mr. Wordsworth's other productions ; with less boldness of originality and less even of that extreme simplicity and lowliness of tone which wavered so prettily in the "Lyrical Ballads" between silliness and pathos. We have imitations of Cowper, and even of Milton, here, engrafted on the natural drawl of the Lakers. . . . What Mr. Wordsworth's ideas of length are, we have no means

of accurately judging, but we cannot help suspecting that they are liberal to a degree that will alarm the weakness of most modern readers. As far as we can gather from the preface, the entire poem is of a biographical nature, and is to contain the history of the author's mind, and of the origin and progress of his poetical powers, up to the period when they were sufficiently matured to qualify him for the great work on which he has been so long employed. Now the quarto before us contains an account of one of his youthful rambles in the vales of Cumberland, and occupies precisely the period of three days ; so that by the use of a very powerful *calculus* some estimate may be formed of the probable extent of the entire biography. . . . The volume before us, if we were to describe it very shortly, we should characterize as a tissue of moral and devotional ravings, in which innumerable changes are rung upon a few very simple and familiar ideas ; but with such an accompaniment of long words, long sentences, and unwieldy phrases ; and such a hub-bub of strained raptures and fantastical sublimities, that it is often extremely difficult for the most skilful and attentive student to obtain a glimpse of the author's meaning—and altogether impossible for an ordinary reader to conjecture what he is about. . . . The chief advocate of Providence and virtue (in the poem) is an *old Scotch Pedlar*, retired indeed from business, but still rambling about in his former haunts and gossiping among his old customers without his pack on his shoulders. The other personages of the drama are a retired military chaplain who has grown half an atheist and half a misanthrope—the wife of an unprosperous weaver—a servant girl with her infant—a parish pauper and one or two other personages of equal rank and dignity. . . . His (Wordsworth's) taste for simplicity is evinced by sprinkling up and down his interminable declamations a few descriptions of baby-houses, and of old hats with wet brims ; and his amiable partiality for humble life by assuring us that a wordy rhetorician, who talks about Thebes and allegorizes all the heathen mythology, was once a pedlar—and making him break in upon his magnificent orations with two or three awkward notices of something that he had seen when selling winter raiment about the country—or of the changes in the state of society which had almost annihilated his former calling.'

It will be necessary to quote only one other example of the many such at hand, and this last critique is

selected for the reason that it concerns Wordsworth's political character rather than his poetic pretensions.

It is easy to remember countless cases of men who began life as ardent Liberal partisans and ended it as stolid Tory advocates. The phenomenon is not hard of explanation where the poetical temperament interposes between a man's convictions and his sympathies. However pronounced at the first a poet's political principles may be on the side of liberty and equality, and however vehemently his whole nature may inveigh against the injustice or tyranny of existing orders of society, he cannot, it would seem, resist the influence of a temperament which inclines him to repose, to a kind of reform induced only by the quiet rule of individual rectitude, and which makes him hate popular gabble and the wanton desire for change. Wordsworth's was in part such a case as we have indicated. He began life with passionate hopes for the French Revolution, zeal for which was then dominating all ardent spirits—full, as it appeared to be, of high aims; and ensured, as it seemed to be, of noble ends. To the poet the days in which his life was cast seemed controlled to imperishable issues:

‘Dear God! it was a luxury to be,
And to be young was very heaven.’

It is—we must confess it—a damping drop from the air-blown bladder of so much hopefulness to behold all this youthful enthusiasm reduced, twenty years later, to the dull duty of distributing stamps in the county of Westmoreland; yet Wordsworth's political

ardour found, if not its death, its grave-clothes in such an office. And when the poet became distributor of stamps, be sure the Liberal press did not forget to remind him of his apostasy. Like the Athenian fellow-journeymen of Nick Bottom the weaver, when he donned the ass's head, they did not omit to cry out : 'Bottom, thou art translated!' This is how the *Morning Chronicle* in 1813 satirizes the poet :

'When Favour's golden hook is baited,
How swiftly patriot-zeal relaxes ;
In *silent* state see Wordsworth seated
Commissioner of stamps and taxes.

'Wordsworth, most artless among Bards,
Who talk'd of Milton and of Freedom,
Scorn'd service purchased by rewards,
And pitied those who chanced to need 'em.

'Since poets are but men, 'tis said
The question may be well disputed,
If they can eat Corruption's bread
And still continue unpolluted.

'With dangerous friends, and dangerous foes,
O whither whither do we tend us !
May Heaven in mercy interpose
And from the shafts of both defend us !'

These critiques are dead now, and it seems almost sorry sport to summon them from their graves and make them walk in their shrouds in a light from which seventy years' twilight has been spirited away. But surely their sinister figures, that look out through the film of the vanished eyes of the years that are gone, should for ever stalk through the world as a witness and a warning. One knows not what else of the nature of presumably impossible blundering one may

not accredit after being compelled to believe that Wordsworth was the poet who was spoken of throughout his life in such terms as those quoted of ridicule and contempt. It is true, indeed, that we may not prescribe to any critic how soft or how hard, how friendly or how bitter shall be the phrases he employs in reprehension or ridicule ; but how shall we tolerate the asperity of a style of criticism which is grounded in a *habit* of attack, or countenance a method of inquisition which never makes pretence of entering the domain of fair and philosophical investigation ?

To criticism, argumentative and honourable, yet spirited, stinging and severe, Wordsworth's work is fairly subject, and this it will assuredly one day encounter. It may, for example, be doubted if his imagination is of that highest order to which it was said to belong after the imagination of Shakspeare and Milton. There are those of us who (shirking nothing of the allegiance proper to Wordsworth) believe that in this respect Coleridge and Shelley stand ahead of him. It may further be doubted if vital impulse was more fully developed in his muse than a habit of poetic contemplation. And touching his theory of poetry, it may be questioned if the daily language of the peasant is more properly the language of real life than the language of Milton was ; or if poetry has its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity, rather than from the fiery ordeal itself, crystallized at the point of passion. To criticism like this, shadowed forth in part in the 'Biographia Literaria,' Wordsworth is indeed subject. But such criticism has nothing in common

with the noisy gabble which denied to him every title to sanity and talent, and advanced the charge of raving and imbecility.

And throughout the fifty years wherein the critics of England and Scotland sneered at his work in notes of fatuous pedantry, how was it with him? It was exactly as we could have wished it to be. The voices of the crowd had no power to reach the poet, who was consulting his own heart simply, and patiently leaving the rest to posterity. 'Let the age continue to love its own darkness,' he said; 'I shall continue to write, with, I trust, the light of Heaven upon me.' Again, 'It is impossible,' he writes, 'that any expectations can be lower than mine concerning the immediate effect of my work upon what is called the public. I do not here take into consideration the envy and malevolence and all the bad passions which always stand in the way of a work of any merit from a living poet; but merely think of the pure, absolute, honest ignorance in which all worldlings of every rank and situation must be enveloped, with respect to the thoughts, feelings and images on which the life of my poems depends. The things which I have taken, whether from within or from without, what have they to do with routs, dinners, morning calls, hurry from door to door, from street to street, on foot or in carriage; with Mr. Pitt or Mr. Fox, Mr. Paul or Sir Francis Burdett, the Westminster election or the borough of Honiston?' Truly, for the poor glory of a popular following he cared but little, and by the frenzy of an enfeebled

enemy he remained untouched. Nevertheless of the solid splendour of generous recognition he was not, by ignorance and malevolence, wholly bereft. In 1843, Sir Robert Peel offered him the Laureateship ; and when, four years earlier, Oxford tendered him his honorary degree, he came down from his mountain home to receive it. ' No one present in the theatre that day,' says Frederick Robertson, ' will forget the scene he witnessed.' Every man felt he must lend his help to lift away the load of unmerited obloquy that enveloped a gifted soul ; and when the poet came forward to accept the honour designed for him there ' broke forth a burst of applause, echoed and taken up again and again when it seemed about to die, and again thrice repeated.' It was a noble tribute, but we love to think of the calm, silvery-haired old man, not amidst the tumult of an assembly, but in the solitude and silence of Rydal. There in that valley, lying within the arms of the hills that encircle it, he lived a sweet, sunny life, free from fear that mere dust and noise could shut him out from the honoured hierarchy of English men of letters.

The relations maintained towards Wordsworth by his early critics have an interest apart from all consideration of their injustice or severity. They show, as we have said, how hard it is to the critical intelligence to judge independently of the currently received canons of taste which, whether from love of change, from craving after originality, or from some far higher impulse, the creative instinct in every age displays a disposition to over-ride. Perhaps the *Edin-*

burgh was wrong in concluding that, in the exact sense of the word, Wordsworth was the *originator* of the new poetic sect. What that poet did for poetry in the substitution of the language of real life for the unduly elaborated language of the representative eighteenth-century verse, Cowper had done, and Burns also had compassed, not designedly, but out of the unconscious healthiness of a robust nature. Yet Wordsworth was, if not the first to employ the language of heightened and imaginative prose in the realm of poetry, the first to do so consciously, and to formulate a theory upon his practice. And in these criticisms we perceive with what bitterness of revolt the disciples of the poetic taste that was soon to perish rose against the innovation and against the declared innovator. It is interesting to see how tenaciously the critics of the old school clung to the canons on which they had been suckled, and how grudgingly they relinquished them when wrung from their grasp. Rightly viewed, therefore, the articles from which we have quoted are instructive and suggestive rather than irritating.





SOUTHEY.

SOUTHEY was the first of the Lake poets to obtain substantial recognition, and though the attention afforded him was at first of a kind as unenviable as unlooked-for, it had a distinction (even if only of hatred) which, to a man of his placid temperament, could in the end be nothing but pure gain. In conjunction with Robert Lovell, he published, through the genial Cottle of Bristol, a volume of verse in 1795. The reception of the book was at least unequivocal. After the enumeration of a whole battalion of imperfections, the *Monthly Review* concluded a notice in the following terms :

‘Of these faults, and some others, the present poems are too frequently guilty. We particularly object to a certain wobegone and debilitating affectation of fine feeling, and we hope this mawkish and pernicious doctrine will soon not have a single advocate.’

The book was published not only before the beginning of the author's acquaintance with Wordsworth, but before Coleridge had begun to formulate his new theory of poetry. Moreover, the poems were charac-

terized by the endeavour, then so general, to preserve a diction that should be ornate and uniformly sustained ; certainly they bore no trace of the tenets of the poetic sect soon afterwards started. Indeed, they were in harmony with the pseudo-classical poetic taste of the age, as it filtered through the channel of French literature. Their worst faults were such as are peculiar to poems produced in youth ; assuredly they were in no respect inferior in poetic insight to the 'Joan of Arc' which was issued a year later, or were, at the utmost, only behind that epic in the facility which came with habit and experience and a development of power. Yet, though such as I have quoted was the sentence pronounced on the early effort, no utterance less extravagant than the following served the same critic wherewith to characterize the later work.

'Conceptions more lofty and daring, sentiments more commanding and language more energetic than some of the best passages in this poem afford, will not easily be found. The language is, for the most part, modelled on that of Milton, and not unfrequently it has a strong relish of Shakspeare.'

What the worth is of such critical opinion will be promptly gauged when it is said that the reviewer considers there is too much sameness in the visionary passages which Coleridge contributed to the second book of the poem ; and what the purity was of the encomium tendered will be as speedily estimated when it is added that Southey had contributed sundry original poems to the pages of the periodical in the interval between the dates of the first adverse criticism and of the second laudatory one.

Southey's revolt against established forms in poetry was less pronounced than that of Wordsworth and Coleridge. True, indeed, he aimed as little as either of his colleagues at 'the pointed and fine propriety of Pope;' and when his powers attained their maturity, his productions were as little tainted as theirs could be with the mimic affectations of French classicism. In later years he seemed even anxious to repudiate the allegation that he had ever been concerned with his friends in founding a common school of poetry. It is obvious to us, however, who look back over eighty years of poetic progression, that Southey was influenced by exactly the same forces of conviction as operated in Wordsworth's case; and that, notwithstanding his personal opposition to such classification, he may properly be classed with the leaders of Wordsworth's school.

The difference between his own practice of poetry and that adopted by his precursor was one mainly of method. The principle of his revolt against the popular poetic taste was the same. His varied methods helped him the more speedily to established place. Southey's art shocked fewer preconceived ideas of the proper domain and purpose of poetry. The worst it did was to jaunt in a single poem through all the metres known to literature. Southey never freed himself absolutely from the shackles prescribed for poets of 'sense' and 'wit.' His vital impulse never burst forth unmanageably into spiritual landscapes hitherto untrodden. No ungovernable flash of natural magic ever came uppermost in his soul to pester his

genius 'with dread of trespassing on the realm of arbitrary reason. He was never troubled to weave into the woof of his rational art, the web of some irrational emotion. All that came to him, came tranquilly ; all that he could see he could command ; and no unsatisfied yearning after unattainable things ever threatened to drive him beyond limits of sanity. Moreover, his poetry dealt with lofty or obscure, noble, dubious, or distant subjects, not with homely ones.

He did not offend public vision by proving plainly that it must be blind as a mole to the loveliness of objects that lay touched with beauty all about its feet. That way lay Wordsworth's offence. That way, too, lay the rock on which Coleridge split ; but Southey's muse rode safely over the breakers that encompassed it, and came soonest to anchor. Southey's popularity from 1796 to 1810 (a period in which Wordsworth and Coleridge were constantly assailed with what must be termed insensate vindictiveness) is only to be explained on such grounds as are here indicated.

Southey, unlike Wordsworth, did not deify plates and porringers, and men gathering leeches, and old Scotch pedlars and female vagrants ; unlike Coleridge, he did not 'elegise an ass.' Instead of this, he apotheosized in his early years the remote mythology, and made a great show of shaking a red rag of mystery before men's eyes. And men ran crazy after him for a little while as the consequence. If he desired to illustrate the innate religious bias of the race, and the ineradicable human

consciousness that life must always live, he did not select so homely a medium as a little rustic cottage girl, eight years old, sitting beneath the churchyard tree and singing of her brother and sister in the graves that were green beneath it :

“ But they are dead : these two are dead !
Their spirits are in Heaven !”
’Twas throwing words away : for still
The little maid would have her will
And said, “ Nay, we are seven !” ’

In the place of such childlike matter, Southey, with shrewder judgment, or more submissive spirit, carried his readers to a far-distant land, and there made a dread destroyer dream a dream wherein some kindred truth became revealed. And men approved of the one method, and damned the other. Wordsworth, with resolute perverseness, might run his head against the sober, solid fact of human vanity, and human stupidity too, but Southey buttressed up the dense mass of its colossal clumsiness. It is well said that we are never so entirely pleased as when shown our own faces reflected in a mirror that beautifies us ; and it was because Southey knew how to turn to account the assumption of profundity which found favour in his time that he was pardoned certain transgressions on conventional usage, which in other and greater poets was visited with merciless condemnation.

From 1805 to 1810 Southey was, so far as we are able to judge from perusal of the periodical press, entirely popular in England. The *Monthly Review*

had by that time become convinced of the 'nobility of his genius;' the *European Magazine* regarded him favourably and the *British Critic* affectionately. What the attitude was of the *Monthly Mirror* and the *Monthly Magazine* is scarcely worth while to inquire. Perhaps the severest strictures on his productions appeared parenthetically in the otherwise laudatory notices of the *Eclectic Review*. 'To think,' said the reviewer, after an enumeration of the incidents of the 'Curse of Kehama,' 'that amidst the beams of the sun and moon, the light of the Christian religion, and the sense and philosophy of modern Europe, a genius like Mr. Southey's should be solemnly employed in business like this!' 'Tis much,' as Christopher Sly would say; but the whipping is a gentle and humane one, such as friend Launce might have administered to his unchristian dog Crab.

To all that has been said of Southey's early popularity with the critics, exception must of course be claimed in favour of the robust puritanism of the *Edinburgh Review*. The clever 'Kirk-men' could no more pardon Southey his violation of the principles of the catholic poetic church of which they were in their proper persons the last-surviving doctors and saints, than they could pardon Wordsworth a like offence. The following appears in the *Edinburgh* for 1802:

'The subject of this poem "Thalaba" is almost as ill-chosen as the diction; and the conduct of the fable as disorderly as the versification. . . . Our readers will easily perceive that it consists altogether of the most wild and extravagant fictions, and openly sets nature and probability at defiance.

In its action it is not an imitation of anything ; and excludes all rational criticism. . . . Tales of this sort may amuse children, and interest for a moment by the prodigies they exhibit. . . . The pleasure afforded by performances of this sort is very much akin to that which may be derived from the exhibition of a harlequin farce ; where instead of just imitations of nature and human character, we are entertained with the transformation of cauliflowers and beer-barrels, the apparition of ghosts and devils and all the magic of the wooden sword.'

One wonders as one reads such contemptuous allusion to amusements usually considered harmless, that some mad wag of that day did not shake his forefinger in the faces of these northern censors, and address them in the scalding words of Sir Toby Belch to Malvolio: 'Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' It must not be forgotten, however, that three years later (1805), Southey had the wisdom to have his new poem 'Madoc' printed by Ballantyne of Edinburgh ; and then the rigour of the reviewers' asperity was softened by the admission that 'the poem bore distinctive testimony to the genius and amiable character of the author.' But just when the breach appeared to be closing, and the *Edinburgh* (not without many an austere snarl and an austerer smile) was manifesting a disposition to come round to the popular appreciation of Southey's genius, political rancour intervened between the poet and his northern critics, and left them, like the cliffs in 'Christabel,' gaping at each other until the end, from opposite sides of an impassable chasm. The story of that further separation involves the hasty traversing of

the oft-repeated history of the early Socialism and subsequent Toryism of the Lakers.

When Coleridge, Southey and Lovell left their universities, they were all three passionate pantisocratis. The French Revolution was in their case, as in Wordsworth's, dominating all ardour and enthusiasm. They could no more resist the spirit of the day that controlled young natures to socialistic issues than Hamlet and Horatio could have held their way at Wittenberg against the encroaching current of religious reform ; and just as the one circle carried to Elsinore the bias of mind that inclined them to see too plainly how woefully the time was out of joint, so the other brotherhood took to Bristol a visionary scheme designed to set it right.

The young socialists—or should we say communists?—recognised to the full the barbarity and injustice of much existing inequality ; perceived the tyrannical wickedness of a world in which the days of the mass of men were few and evil ; beheld beneath the upward and outward glitter of the temple of commercial progression, a seething mass of corruption, war and yet more devastating peace of many kinds. All this insight was theirs in common with thinking men in all ages, but their departure from the beaten path of those who—any time for five hundred years—had grinned under such anomalies and borne them, lay in their solemn hopefulness of soothing down the sore ills men suffered from.

They despaired of encompassing the infinity of evil from within ; so they agreed to spread canvas to the

gale and betake themselves to undivided dales on the banks of the Susquehannah, there to drive the tinkling team by day, and at sober eve to tune the rustic reed in 'solemn cenotaph' of 'time-shrouded minstrelsy' to some happier Chatterton than the one whose ashes they would leave behind. Strange fantasies, and as vain as strange, the fleeting offspring of ardent hearts, musing in moods dreamy and vague on the sad truths of stern life. Few of us are so free of such weaknesses, however, that we can afford to stand on the 'humour of our state' and contemplate them with exalted 'demure travel of regard.' Robert Owen and Lanark; Emerson, Hawthorne, and Brook Farm; Ruskin and the Guild of St. George, are witnesses to man's unquenchable faith in the possibility of a state of comparative social perfectibility. More of us than would care to own to it, and some of us who are so far from being as 'hoary-headed' as the *Edinburgh* reviewers announced themselves to be that we have scarcely passed the period of early manhood, have once cherished a vain scheme for social amelioration which the stress of years has torn out of our grasp. Of course there are superior souls who have remained throughout untouched by the 'brood of idle phantasy,' who have never dwelt with so mean a thing as enthusiasm for some hopeless project, or known the white dove of their expectations go forth over the waste of waters and return to them empty and weary of wing. Such sober spirits live in the sun, and, like the moralist, practise behaviour to their own shadows. They affect to begin where we have ended, and we

weaker brethren are wont to marvel when we see them pass us by, 'quenching' (like the 'rare turkey cock,' Malvolio), 'the familiar smile, with an austere regard of control.'

Such projects for societies with a community of simple interests are always relinquished sooner or later, and the Susquehannah scheme was abandoned before an attempt to realize it was begun. Were the young reformers convicted of error? Ah no! a more potent and immediate obstacle intervened to defer all contemplated immigration. The fact was, as most of us remember, there were at Bristol sisters of the name of Fricker, and Coleridge and Southey interrupted further socialistic preliminaries in order to marry them. Matrimony put an effectual stop to all plans for social improvement, except such as began, like charity, at home. How could an ardent communist, who was a bard to boot, trouble himself with schemes for the amelioration of the race at a time when (as the good Joseph Cottle avers) he was troubled in his soul to find a frying-pan, and still more to find a sole to fry in it? And so, Susquehannah and 'tinkling teams,' and 'solemn cenotaphs' went the way of all such.

The bearing of all this on Southey's subsequent relation to his critics becomes obvious when we consider the political position of the periodical press. The *Courier* was emphatically Tory; and the *European Magazine* was also Ministerial. The *Edinburgh* was the last prominent organ of the old school of criticism, but it was the first notable propagandist of the new school of politics. The *Examiner* followed, six years

after its Scotch precursor, with more than its predecessor's ardour of Whig partizanship and an added scurrility which speedily earned for it many opprobrious names, and for its editor, Leigh Hunt, imprisonment. As a counter-weight to so much vigorous opposition the *Quarterly Review* was started in 1809. The review was, at the time, supposed to be the official organ of the Government, and certainly Canning and Croker appear to have had some share in its initiation. Gifford was its editor, and he gathered about him a large circle of able writers, calculated to hold their own against the Jeffreys and the Broughams of the rival periodical. Now, Southey's political leanings had been slowly gravitating towards Toryism since the early days of his Pantisocracy, and of his and Coleridge's Jacobin lectures at Bristol. Indeed Southey had already got so far as to say that to his mind the only remedy for the sedition that was rife at the time, was to check the press, and to suppress all calumny by the penal transportation of those who disseminated it. So the poet was offered a foremost place on the staff of the *Quarterly*, and he accepted it, and held it almost down to his death. Of course this proceeding seemed to the rival reviewers 'most tolerable,' as Dogberry might say, 'and not to be endured.' It must be allowed that in the exercise of his functions as a political writer Southey sometimes passed those lines beyond which men cease to be reasonably tolerant to persons whose opinions are opposed to their own. Hence every criticism of his poetry written after 1810 must be interpreted by the

light of the critic's attitude towards the poet's politics. If we find that the *Examiner* tells him, with abundant frankness, that he is 'the high priest of impertinence in poetry,' we must not rashly conclude that such was the sincere opinion of the paper, but rather remember that the said priest thundered his anathemas against the writers in the *Examiner* as against sciolists, profligates and coxcombs. If, again, we find another journal style him a 'prose-poet,' and add that he is 'an apostate and a contemptuously malignant renegado,' we must bear it in mind that the poet pronounced the critic's judgment the 'effervescence of his incorrigible overweening self-opinion—a thing that ought to be put down by the rack and the thumb-screw.' Of course the *Edinburgh*, with exalted and austere superiority to all sense of rivalry, never allowed itself to make allusion to the political and anonymous side of Southey's writings; but nevertheless it kept that side constantly in mind, and touched upon it as an interlude to the criticism of the other side. It took care that Southey lost no particle of contempt from the circumstance that it ignored the *Quarterly*. This is how the *Edinburgh* in 1811 approaches Southey's 'Curse of Kehama,' published a year earlier:

'We admire the genius of Mr. Southey; we reverence the lofty principles and we love the tenderness of heart that are visible in all his productions.'

(The reviewer, like the clown in the 'Twelfth Night,' is obviously one of those gentle ones that would use the devil himself with courtesy.)

'We have been accused of malice and of partiality respect-

ing Mr. Southey. . . . We profess the stately office of correcting and instructing. . . . Mr. Southey, of course, equally despises our censure and our advice ; and we have no quarrel with him for this. We have been too long conversant with the untractable generation of authors, to expect that our friendly expostulations should have any effect upon them—except as exponents of the silent, practical judgment of the public. To that superior tribunal, however, we do think ourselves entitled to refer. . . . There is, indeed, another and a final appeal—to Posterity—from the benefit of which we are far from wishing to exclude any unfortunate persons whose circumstances may reduce them to rely on it. . . .’

(This is, of course, a sneer at Wordsworth.)

‘But the cases, we believe, are wonderfully rare in which that mysterious and inaccessible judge has ever reversed the unfavourable sentences of the ordinary jurisdictions ; and there seems even to be great reason for thinking, that such reversals will be still fewer in time to come.’

The omniscient reviewer scarcely bargained on the reversal of his own sentences ; but, nevertheless, as the old hermit of Prague, who never saw pen and ink, very wittily remarked : ‘That, that is, is.’

‘Things are wonderfully changed in this respect, since a licentious and illiterate age withheld from Milton the fame which its successor was so proud to bestow.’

The *Edinburgh* said exactly the reverse of this (concerning the relation of Milton to his age) two years previously.

‘All this takes away almost the possibility of that neglect which, in former times, stood so often in the way, not merely of reputation, but of fair trial. . . . We leave Mr. Southey the full benefit of his chance. . . . He should take warning while it is yet time. His admirers, we fear, are not the best sort of admirers——’

(They were—among others—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Wilson, Lamb, Sir Robert Peel and Canning.)

‘In so far as we have been able to gather, there are but few persons of cultivated taste and sober judgment in his train ; and his glories are celebrated, we think, chiefly by the young, the enthusiastic and the uninstructed—persons whose fancies are easily captivated with glitter, exaggeration and novelty, and whose exuberant sensibility is apt to flame out at the approach even of the false fire of bombast and affectation. . . . Almost all nice critics and fastidious judges——’

(These were, beyond question, Jeffrey, Brougham, and a host of lesser critics long since forgotten).

‘——and the greater part indeed of men of improved and delicate taste, not only refuse to admire Mr. Southey and his colleagues, but treat them with absolute contempt and derision. . . . For our own part, we consider it indeed our chief duty to counteract the neglect into which he seems to be falling.’

Merciful judges ! but mark how on the next page they assail Southey with so much acrimony that he might have sung some contemporary euphemism to the familiar lines :

‘It was all very well to dissemble your love,
But *why* did you kick me downstairs?’

The review continues :

‘His taste in description is as remarkably childish as his powers of execution in this branch of his art are rare and admirable. Everything in his pictures is gaudy and glittering, full of coloured light and gems, and metallic splendour ; and sparkles with such portentous finery as to remind us of the old-fashioned grottoes and shell-work of the last generation, or the gilded caverns and full-lighted transparencies of the opera-house. His excessive love of the marvellous and gigantic is a symptom not less decisive ; and his delineations of persons and affection are still more strongly marked with the same infantine character. He seems to think grown men and women too corrupt and hardened for poetical purposes ; and

therefore all his interesting personages lisp like sucklings, and his unamiable ones are, as nearly as possible, such sort of monsters as nurses imagine to frighten naughty boys into obedience.'

It is a problem that must always present difficulties to an impartial onlooker, how a periodical can pronounce passages of poems utterly unfit for publication and an insult to public taste, and yet deliberately reprint them in full, one after one, and so magnify the mischief in the degree in which its own circulation is greater than that of the book reviewed. After twelve entire pages of extracts from Southey's 'Curse of Kehama,' the *Edinburgh* concludes with this curious utterance :

'We close our extracts and take our leave of Mr. Southey. We wish we could entertain any tolerable hopes of converting him from the damnable heresies into which he has fallen, and to which, if he does not reform speedily, we fear his reputation will die a martyr.'

The critiques on Southey which appeared in the *Edinburgh* after 1809 had always the look of indirect thrusts at the *Quarterly*. The ribble-rabble of the *Examiner's* poetical animosity was more open and amusing. When Southey was made Laureate (and afterwards further endowed with a pension of £200 a year), the *Examiner* published the following satirical verses, purporting to be written by the bellman of the parish of St. Paul, Covent Garden :

'My honest masters, take care of extremes.
Bob Southey, once upon a time it seems
(Too young to know the value of decorum),
Held in disdain all crowns and those who wore 'em ;

For *suffering* them, he saw no reason why ;
 As to *flattering* them, he'd rather die.
 Such was his tone for years, and such his scorning,
 When lo ! one fine autumnal blushing morning,
 Changing his *mind* and *coat*, as Crabbe would say,
 He comes to Court—the oddest of the gay,
 And there not only lays his notions by,
 Kissing the Regent's hand with down-dropt eye
 He puts the Crown on, that was worn by Pye !
 My noble masters, how could this change be ?

* * * *

I'll tell you what it was, my masters dear—
 Pure weakness, and a hundred pounds a year.

* * * *

In what, my candid masters, I have said,
 Do not suppose I've been by malice led ;
 I would not of his fame the Laureate rob ;
 Think not your Bellman would speak ill of Bob ;
 'Tis of his odd extremes I speak alone ;
 In all things else—his verse, his taste, his tone,
 I'm sure I look on Bob's fame as my own.'

This appeared in 1814, and when two years afterwards Southey published his 'Lay of the Laureate,' addressed to Princess Charlotte, it was made so manifest that his political principles had suffered total eclipse, that the anger of the *Examiner* could no longer find vent by the medium of polite speech. The journalist called the poet 'a cad,' a 'painful hieroglyphic of humanity,' a 'canting hypocrite,' an 'apostate,' a 'renegado,' a 'shallow idiot,' an 'incorrigible bigot,' and by other such gentle names.

'The poetry of the "Lay" is beneath criticism ; it has all sorts of obvious commonplace defects, without any beauties either obvious or recondite. It is the namby-pamby of the Tabernacle ; a Methodist sermon turned into doggerel verse. . . . Does our Laureate think it according to Court etiquette that he should be as old-fashioned in his language as in the cut of his clothes ?

... He not only thinks whatever opinion he holds for the time infallible, but that no other is even to be tolerated, and that none but knaves and fools can differ from him. ... He regards a Catholic or a Presbyterian, a Deist or an Atheist with equal repugnance, and makes no difference between the Pope, the Turk and the Devil. ... He thinks a bad poet a bad man, and would suspect the principles, moral, political, and religious, of anyone who did not spell the word Laureate with an *e* at the end of it. If Mr. Southey were a bigot, it would be well; but he has only the intolerance of bigotry. ... He calls on the Princess Charlotte in the names of the souls of ten thousand little children, who are without knowledge in *this age of light*, "Save, or we Perish;" and yet, sooner than they should be saved by Joseph Fry or Joseph Lancaster, he would see them damned. ... He endeavours to prove that the Prince Regent and the Duke of Wellington (put together) are greater than Bonaparte, but that he is by his own rule a greater man than all three of them. ... We do assure Mr. Southey that we do not envy him his honour. Many people laugh at him, some may blush for him, but nobody envies him. ... Though we do not think Mr. Southey has been quite consistent, we do not now think him a hypocrite. This poem proves it. How should he maintain the same opinion all his life when he cannot maintain it for two stanzas together? The weakness of his reasoning shows that he is the dupe of it. He has not the faculty of perceiving contradictions. He is not accountable for his opinions. There is not a single sentiment advanced in any part of the "Lay" which is not flatly denied in some other part of it.'

Perhaps the most amusing, as also the most ghastly part of the *Examiner's* critiques on Southey centres round the Laureate's controversy with Mr. William Smith. The incidents of that controversy require a word of explanation. In Southey's early Jacobin days, at Bristol (1794), he wrote a dramatic poem, entitled 'Wat Tyler,' satirical of kings and queens, and all tax-gatherers. This he did not publish, but years afterwards a publisher surreptitiously possessed himself of the manuscript and printed it. Southey was highly

incensed, but powerless. In 1817 (twenty-three years later than the date of the poem) he wrote in the *Quarterly* an article on 'Parliamentary Reform,' combating with more than his wonted vehemence the advance of Whig principles.

One day a certain Mr. Smith, M.P., took down to the house a copy of the poem stowed away in one pocket, and a copy of the review stowed away in the other. First lugging out the poem, he read a choice extract, which was of the nature of a dialogue between the blacksmith and his visitor, as they stand together in the smithy while the tax-gatherer goes by—the moral of which, in the 'vaine of ancient Pistol,' might be said to be: 'Base is the slave that pays.' Then lugging out the *Quarterly*, he read some ultra-Tory utterance against conspiracy and sedition. It is not altogether easy to understand how Mr. Smith was allowed to attack an absent man who had not committed an indictable offence; in a place, too, in which the person impeached could never have opportunity of reply. But the thing was done, and done effectually; and all that remained to Southey was to retort in print. This he did in the form of a letter, similar in spirit to that which Burke addressed to the Duke of Bedford in defence of his pension, and obviously designed to compass a similar result. The little hubbub was, of course, a mighty tempest to the *Examiner*, which forthwith devoted three double-paged articles to a review of the two coupled works in question, choosing as motto (with refined cruelty), a version of lines by the Laureate's friend Wordsworth:

‘So was it when my life began ;
 So is it now I am a man ;
 So shall it be when I grow old and die.
 The child’s the father of the man :
 Our years flow on
 Linked each to each by natural piety.’

The review taunted Southey with a desire to ‘jump the stripling’ (of nine-and-twenty) (?) ‘into the man,’ whenever the latter had a mind ‘to jump into a place and pension,’ and assured him that he publicly exposed his mind to be anatomized whilst he was living—laying open his character to the scalping-knife, guiding the philosophic hand in its painful researches, while on the ‘bald crown of our *petit tondu*, in vain concealed under withered bay leaves and a few contemptible grey hairs,’ might be seen the organ of vanity triumphant.

The review runs :

‘It is said to be a wise child that knows its own father ; and we understand Mr. Southey (who is in this case reputed father and son) utterly disclaims the hypostatical union between the *Quarterly Review* and the Dramatic Poet, and means to enter an injunction against the latter as a bastard and impostor. Appearances are somewhat staggering against the legitimacy of the descent, yet we perceive a strong family likeness remaining in spite of the lapse of years and alteration of circumstances. We should not, indeed, be able to predict that the author of “Wat Tyler” would ever write the article on Parliamentary Reform, nor should we, either at first or second sight, perceive that the Quarterly Reviewer had ever written a poem like that which is before us ; but if we were *told* that both performances were literally and *bonâ fide* by the same person, we should have little hesitation in saying to Mr. Southey, “Thou art the man.” We know no other person in whom fierce extremes meet with such mutual self-complacency ; whose opinions change so much without any change in the author’s mind ; who lives so entirely in “the present ignorant thought” without the smallest “dis-course of reason looking before or after.” Mr. Southey is a

man incapable of reasoning connectedly on any subject. He has not strength of mind to see the whole of any question : he has not modesty to suspend his judgment till he has examined the grounds of it. . . . *The woman that deliberates is lost.* So it is with the effeminate soul of Mr. Southey. . . . His public spirit was a prude and a scold ; and “his poor virtue” turned into a literary prostitute is grown more abusive than ever. . . . The author of “Wat Tyler” was an ultra-Jacobin ; the author of Parliamentary Reform is an ultra-Royalist ; the one was a frantic demagogue ; the other is a servile court-tool : the one vented those opinions which gratified the vanity of youth ; the other adopts those prejudices which are most conducive to the convenience of age : the one vilified kings, priests, and nobles ; the other vilifies the people—the one is for universal suffrage ; . . . and the other is for the Suspension of the Habeas Corpus, and the putting down of the *Examiner* by the sword, the dagger, or the thumb-screw.

* * * * *

‘Our simple Laureate was sharp upon his hoyden Jacobin mistress, who brought him no dowry, neither place nor pension, who “found him poor and kept him so” by her prudish notions of virtue. He divorced her, in short, for nothing but the spirit and success with which she resisted the fraud and force to which the old bawd Legitimacy was for ever resorting to overpower her resolution and fidelity. He said she was a virago, a cunning gipsy, always in broils about her honour and the inviolability of her person, and always getting the better in them ; furiously scratching the face or cruelly tearing off the hair of the said pimping old lady, who would never let her alone night or day. But since her foot slipped one day on the ice, and the detestable old hag tripped up her heels, and gave her up to the kind keeping of the allied Sovereigns, Mr Southey has devoted himself to her more fortunate and wealthy rival : he is become uxorious in his second matrimonial connection ; and though his false Duessa has turned out a very witch, a foul, ugly witch, a murderess, a sorceress, perjured and a harlot, drunk with insolence, mad with power, a griping rapacious wretch, bloody, luxurious, wanton, malicious, not sparing steel, or poison, or gold, to gain her ends—bringing famine, pestilence and death in her train—infesting the air with her thoughts, killing the beholders with her looks, claiming mankind as her property

and using them as her slaves—driving everything before her, and playing the devil wherever she comes, Mr. Southey sticks to her in spite of everything, and for very shame lays his head in her lap, paddles with the palms of her hands, inhales her hateful breath, leers in her eyes and whispers in her ears, calls her little fondling names, Religion, Morality, and Social Order ; takes for his motto,

“Be to her faults a little blind,
Be to her virtues very kind ;”

sticks close to his filthy bargain, and will not give her up, *because she keeps him*, and he is down in her will. Faugh !

‘Twas much ;’ but the Laureate was soon to be laid double in other sense. In the *Examiner* (1817) was published what at first sight seemed to be the most matter-of-fact announcement of ‘the death and funeral of the late Mr. Southey.’

‘On Thursday se’nnight, according to a notice in the *Courier*, from the pen of his friend and physician the celebrated Dr. Paracelsus Broadhum Coleridge, departed this life the better portion of Robert Southey, Esquire, formerly “Man of Humanity,” and Independent Poet, latterly Poet Laureate, and Member of the Royal Spanish Academy.’

It was the supposed death and funeral of Southey’s reputation that was announced. The *Examiner* dwelt lovingly on a few gentle traits of the character of the departed.

‘He would go galloping after divers Reformers, calling out to them all the while in such terms as the following : “Hallo, there ! you vagabonds, thieves, liars, incendiaries, and worse than housebreakers, whom I formerly agreed with,—*I* was an honest and virtuous youth, a stripling of nine-and-twenty, for thinking as you do ; but *you* are a pack of rascals, yelping curs, bears, tigers, and boars, for thinking as I did ; and you especially who are no older than I was, and only think half of what I did, are a parcel of provoking beasts, brutes, cattle, vermin, and reptiles.”’

Then follows a detailed account of the processional order of the funeral, showing the places of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Wilson, Gifford, Murray, Canning, and Croker. The *Examiner* had not yet done. Having made a ghostly hit so signal, it was resolved henceforth to improve the occasion. The following week's issue presented a 'startling statement' of extraordinary procedure on the part of 'the dead body of the late Mr. Southey.' The remains of the deceased Laureate had while awaiting interment been lying at the house of 'Murrian,' the publisher, and there Coleridge, Wilson, Gifford, and company were holding a solemn wake, all solaced by pipes and brandy, when the deceased rose in his shroud and pronounced a scalding invective on Mr. William Smith, whose calumny had followed and haunted him even beyond the grave. This is the close of the oration :

'How far the name of Southey will be immortal, time will decide ; and I have no doubt, decide as he has done himself. I shall not perish, that's certain—I shall have lives of me "always prefixed to my works" and "transferred to literary histories and to the biographical dictionaries, not only of this but of all countries." It strikes me also that I shall be in all accounts of eminent men, in indexes, catalogues, lists, references, quotations, extracts, choice flowers, and other reminiscences of infinite sorts, both here, hereafter and everywhere. There it will be related, among other excellent traits, that I lived in the bosom of my family (which of course nobody else does), and in "absolute retirement" (which is a merit in me, though not in others). . . . Therein it will be related of me that I grew older as most people do, and altered my opinions as many (silly) people do not. Finally, there it will be said that "in an age of personality I abstained from all satire," with the small exception of the instances mentioned ; and that the "only occasion on which I condescended to *reply*," instead of attack anonymously, was when a certain *Mister* in Parliament—namely you, *Mister*

William Smith—was base, mean, odious, foolish, peevish, egotistical and atrocious enough to attack me openly.'

'So saying, to the great apparent satisfaction of himself, and relief of poor Murrian, the posthumous orator returned majestically to his bier, and adjusted his repose with a greater and more Cæsarean dignity than ever Liston did on a like occasion, gave one look round him of mingled triumph and contempt, and relapsed into his proper mortality. Peace be to his shade !'

All these tempests are now passed — all these phantoms are laid. Southey, the poet, has taken his place among men of letters, and perhaps it is not a foremost place. The critic who goes to his work to-day finds many finished pictures, much brilliance of colouring, infinite boldness and novelty of invention, incomparable moral grandeur, and many sober beauties of language and construction ; but the touchstone of ultimate greatness he may not find. The highest lyric gift was beyond Southey, but how few have compassed it ? He dissipated his dexterity of hand ; he attempted too many kinds of composition ; nor, had he conserved his energies, would his genius have lifted him to much loftier rank. But it is his poetry alone that affords material for censure. His guerdon of praise must be without suspicion of blame where his life and character stand for judgment. His personal purity was indeed the purity of Marcus Cato, who was virtuous by the necessity of a happy nature which could not be otherwise.

'I dwell,' says Coleridge, 'with unabated pleasure on the strong and sudden, yet I trust not fleeting, influence which my moral being underwent on my acquaintance with him. . . As son, brother, hus-

band, father, master, friend, he is alike unostentatious and exemplary.' It is possible to make too much of a man's private character where his public behaviour comes up for comment; we resent such intrusion of the inward on the domain of the outward life; but Southey was so frequently in his own day charged with over-reaching ambition that an impartial critic coming more than fifty years later cannot forbear to quote, in repudiation of the charge, a portion of a letter never meant for the public eye. When Sir Robert Peel offered Southey a baronetcy, as an adornment of what he termed 'the greatest name in English literature,' and eminent men in London urged him to leave his solitude at the foot of Skiddaw, and live among them, he wrote to a friend :

'There is such a comfort in one's old coat and old hoes, one's own chair and own fireside, one's own writing-desk and own library—with a little girl climbing to my neck and saying, "Don't go to London papa; you must stay with Edith"—and a little boy whom I have taught to speak the language of cats, dogs, cuckoos, jackdaws, etc., before he can articulate a word of his own—there is such a comfort in all these things that *transportation* to London seems a harder punishment than any sins of mine deserve.'

Shall we not, indeed, drop the curtain gently on such a scene?



COLERIDGE.

MUCH as we now admire the genius of this writer, we are none of us amazed when we learn that in his own time he was the subject of merciless lampoon, and the victim of malignant assault. What had he in common with the many personifications of pedantry and jealousy that walked the earth in his day in the guise of learning and morality? At his worst and their best—he was erratic, and they were endowed with the amiable regularity of an eight-day clock. Coleridge never properly felt the solid earth beneath his feet; he was, indeed, ‘the reverse of Antæus, and the contact of earth took all strength out of him.’ When he did tread the world of actualities, he was constantly caught in tangled brambles. His realm was above the earth; it was in the region which an able writer has called ‘Nowhere;’ and within that dreamland of mingled music and colour, in which his genius lived, his sway was absolute. But none the less on that account did the critics of his period discharge at him and at it many portentous volleys from the puny popgun of criticism.

The following passage, published in the *Examiner* in 1816, denotes but too accurately the attitude observed towards him by his contemporaries.

‘No man ever gave Mr. Coleridge a penny for his thoughts. His are all maiden ideas : immaculate conceptions. . . . Each several work exists only in the imagination of the author, and is quite inaccessible to the understandings of his readers. . . . We can give as good a guess at the design of his Lay-Sermon which is not published as of the *Friend*, the Preliminary Articles in the *Courier*, the *Watchman*, the *Conciones ad Populum*. . . . Let the experiment be tried, and if, on committing the manuscript to the press, the author is caught in the fact of a single intelligible passage, we will be answerable for Mr. Coleridge’s loss of character. . . . What is his *Friend* itself but an enormous title-page ; the longest and most tiresome prospectus ever written ; an endless preface to an imaginary work ; a table of contents that fills the whole volume ; a huge bill of fare of all possible subjects, *with not an idea to be had for love or money ?* . . . Mr. Coleridge appears in the character of the Unborn Doctor—the very Barmecide of knowledge—the Prince of preparatory authors !

‘He never is—but always *to be* wise. He is the Dog in the Manger of literature, an intellectual Mar-Plot, who will neither let anybody else come to a conclusion, nor come to one himself.’

‘His ideas seek to avoid all contact with substances. Innumerable evanescent thoughts dance before his sight, like insects in the evening sun. Truth to him is a ceaseless round of contradictions ; he lives in the belief of a perpetual lie ; and in affecting to think what he pretends to say. His mind is in a constant state of flux and reflux ; he is like the sea-horse in the ocean ; he is the man in the Moon, the Wandering Jew. . . .

‘Mr. Shandy would have settled him—“You have little or no nose, sir.” . . .

‘His genius has angel’s wings, but neither hands nor feet. . . . His imagination thus becomes metaphysical, his metaphysics fantastical, his wit heavy, his arguments light, his poetry prose, his prose poetry, his politics *turned*—but not to account.’

The earliest notice of Coleridge which we can find

appears in the *Monthly Review* for 1796, and the entire text of it is as follows :

‘2 POLITICAL LECTURES.

This animated author tells us, in his preface, that these two discourses were delivered in February, 1795. They are replete with violent anti-ministerial declamation, but not vulgar.’

‘ANOTHER LECTURE.

“Ditto repeated,” as our good friend Mr. Gallipot so often expresses it, in his annual bill for Baume de Vie disguised, and James’s Powder under some other name.’

The above curt summary of the contents of these lectures is at least as amusing as, and infinitely less reprehensible than, the following on a similar subject published in the *Examiner* twenty years later.

‘This Lay-Sermon (on the Distress) puts us in mind of Mahomet’s coffin which was suspended between heaven and earth, or of the flying island at Laputa, which hovered over the head of Gulliver. Or it is like the descent of Cloven Tongues. . . .

‘This work is so obscure, that it has been supposed to be written in cypher, and that it is necessary to read it upwards and downwards, or backwards and forwards, as it happens to make head or tail of it. The effect is monstrously like the qualms produced by the heaving of a ship becalmed at sea ; the motion is so tedious, unprogressive and sickening.’

It is significant of the value of contemporary criticism in the case of Coleridge that those of his works which have not endured until now, met at the outset with encomiastic comment ; and that only the three or four works which last, and are likely to last, met with critical mangling or the contempt of silence. In 1796 Coleridge published, through Cottle of Bristol, a small volume of juvenile pieces. The poems were written in a laborious and florid diction ; indeed,

they were chiefly characterized by an utterly indiscriminate use of elaborate and swelling language and imagery. Yet the following are the terms in which the *Monthly Review* noticed the publication.

‘Poets have been called *maniacs*, and their writings too frequently justify the application of the degrading epithet. Too long has the modern copied the ancient poet in decorating folly with the elegant attractions of verse. It is time to enthrone reason on the summit of Parnassus. Mr. Coleridge seems solicitous to consecrate his noble lyre to truth, virtue, and humanity.’

Coleridge speedily stepped beyond his effeminate beginnings into a method of art a long way ahead of his early efforts in simplicity and directness, but before he got quite quit of his early rhetoric, he wrote a Sonnet satirical of his own verses, which is so masterly and amusing in itself, and so unique as a criticism of the literary faults it ridicules, that we cannot forbear to find a place for it here. It was published under the pseudonym of Nehemiah Higginbotham, in the second number of the *Monthly Magazine*.

‘THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT.

‘And this reft house is that, the which he built,
Lamented Jack ! and here his malt he piled,
Cautious in vain ! these rats that squeak so wild,
Squeak not unconscious of their father’s guilt.
Did he not see her gleaming through the glade !
Belike ’twas she, the maiden all forlorn.
What though she milked no cow with crumpled horn,
Yet, aye she haunts the dale where erst she strayed :

And aye, beside her stalks her amorous knight !
Still on his thighs their wonted brogues are worn,
And through those brogues, still tattered and betorn,
His hindward charms gleam an unearthly white.
Ah ! thus through broken clouds at night's high noon
Peeps in fair fragments forth the full-orb'd harvest-moon.'

Only two years after the date of the juvenile volume, which we have seen so injudiciously praised, appeared the first series of the 'Lyrical Ballads,' containing, as Coleridge's contribution, 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere,' yet we can find no direct review of this poem in any of the foremost periodicals of the day, although the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review* allude to it. Occasional mention of the weird supernaturalism of 'a certain wild creation,' known by its name, is found at long intervals, coupled with allusion to the political writer by whom it was written. The following appears parenthetically in the *British Critic*, in a review of a prose work by Coleridge.

'In his poetical compositions we own we see but little on which it would be prudent to bestow unqualified commendation. They exhibit few traces of fine feeling, and still fewer of correct and polished taste ; wildness of imagination is the predominant quality of his genius.'

Of such kind, were the allusions made to the poems, of which the 'Ancient Mariner' was the chief. Even Hazlitt could find nothing better to say of the great work in question than that the moral sentiment in it appeared to impair the imaginative excellence. It is indeed a solid and enduring reply to the asperity of the criticism (and the silence too) of the critics of the time, that posterity has assigned

to that poem a place amongst the highest examples of lyric art. It is not that the 'Ancient Mariner' solves any 'problems' of human life or destiny that we value it. As a poet, Coleridge was too inconclusive to attempt anything of that nature. He was too purely a poet to be anything but irresponsible in the exercise of his art. He had no care for moral problems where poetry was his aim. He was haunted by no spirit of didacticism. What his precise vision of life is in his great sea-story, it is more than meaningless to inquire. Be sure he hated at all times, and as heartily as Keats, the poetry that has a palpable design upon us, and, if we do not agree, 'puts its hand in its trousers-pocket.' Not that the 'Ancient Mariner' exhibits any of 'the splendid incompleteness' with which Coleridge is constantly charged; it is a finished work of art, and if we would find the soul of it, we must regard it *as* art, not nature, or the masquerade of nature, and yield ourselves to its charm. The mystery of it is then dissipated, though in a higher sense it remains; the purpose of it is plain, yet hidden. We know all that we need to know of how it came to be what it is.

The 'Ancient Mariner' is a poem of which (in the experience of most of us) the first impression dates back to those earliest years when the Bible and the Pilgrim's Progress made up the whole body of serious reading; but if we could encounter it first of all late in life, after the stream of more modern literature had filtered into our minds, it would probably seem to us like meeting for the first

time in person some great writer of whom we have known much through his books. For just as in the one case, many qualities of mind and heart which have endeared the writer to us, find to our heightened sense a kind of visible embodiment in the face, voice, gait and gesture of the man in whose work we recognised them ; so in the other, many exquisite and original imaginative fantasies which we must have seen wandering through uncertain channels, would find their true place and fitting mission in the beautiful and complete conception from which they were borrowed. Many familiar lines of profound insight would come upon us with a fine and startling suddenness, and banish the regret that they had haunted us as shadowy wraiths that could find no home until they found one there.

When we said that the few works (in addition to the 'Ancient Mariner') which last, and are likely to last, were mercilessly assailed by contemporary critics, we had not in mind the tragedy entitled 'Remorse,' though that was ridiculed on the ground of some supposed metaphysical obscurity ; or yet the poems called 'Sibylline Leaves,' though many of them were laughed at for the opposite fault of infantine simplicity. We were rather thinking of the rarely beautiful and permanently good and noble poems, 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan.'

These are the terms in which the *Edinburgh* reviewed 'Christabel' on its publication :

'Upon the whole, we look upon this publication as one of the most notable pieces of impertinence of which the press has lately been guilty ; and one of the boldest experiments that has yet

been made on the patience or understanding of the public. It is impossible, however, to dismiss it without a remark or two. The other publications of the Lake School have generally exhibited talents thrown away upon subjects so mean that no power of genius could ennoble them ; or perverted and rendered useless by a false theory of poetical composition. But even in the worst of them, if we except the "White Doe" of Mr. Wordsworth, and some of the laureate odes, there were always some gleams of feeling or of fancy. But the thing now before us is utterly destitute of value. It exhibits, from beginning to end, not a ray of genius. . . . With the exception of one passage, there is literally not one couplet in the publication before us which would be reckoned poetry, or even sense, were it found in the corner of a newspaper, or on the window of an inn. Must we then be doomed to hear such a mixture of raving and drivelling extolled as the work of a "*wild and original*" genius, simply because Mr. Coleridge has now and then written fine verses, and a brother poet chooses, in his milder mood, to laud him from courtesy or from interest? Are such panegyrics to be echoed by the mean tools of a political faction, because they relate to one whose early prose is understood to be dedicated to the support of all that courtiers think should be supported? If it be true that the author has thus earned the patronage of those liberal dispensers of bounty, we have no objection that they should give him proper proofs of their gratitude ; but we cannot help wishing—for his sake as well as our own—that they would pay in solid pudding instead of empty praise, and adhere, at least in this instance, to the good old system of rewarding their champions with places and pensions, instead of puffing their bad poetry, and endeavouring to cram their nonsense down the throats of all the loyal and well-affected.'

The *Edinburgh* was not alone in its opinion. The *Anti-Jacobin* (1816), said :

'For our own part we confess the perusal of it has excited in our minds nothing but astonishment and disgust ; we have discovered in it wildness enough to confound common-sense. . . . Any attempt to characterize such versification would be vain.'

The *Examiner*, in the same year, said :

'Mr. Coleridge's style is essentially superficial, pretty, orna-

mental, and he has forced it into the service of a story that is petrific. . . . The author, uncertain of the approbation of his readers, thinks he shows his superiority to it by shocking their feelings at the outset, as a clown who is at a loss how to behave himself begins by affronting the company. This is what is called throwing a crust to the critics. . . . The conclusion of the second part of "Christabel" is to us absolutely incomprehensible.'

The publisher (Murray) had advertised 'Christabel' as a poem of which Lord Byron had somewhere said : 'It is a singularly wild and beautiful creation.' On this the *Edinburgh* had the following :

'We are a little inclined to doubt the value of the praise which one poet lends another. It seems nowadays to be the practice of that once irritable race to laud each other without bounds ; and one can hardly avoid suspecting that what is thus lavishly advanced may be laid out with a view to being repaid with interest. . . .

'Much of the art of the *wild* writers consists in sudden transitions—opening eagerly upon some topic, and then flying from it immediately. This, indeed, is known to the medical men who not unfrequently have the care of them, as an unerring symptom.'

The peculiar metre of 'Christabel' did not escape comment. On this the *Edinburgh* said :

'One word as to the metre of "Christabel," or, as Mr. Coleridge terms it, "*The Christabel*"—happily enough ; for indeed we doubt if the peculiar force of the definite article was ever more strongly exemplified. He says, that though the reader may fancy there prevails a great *irregularity* in the metre, some lines being of four, others of twelve syllables, yet in reality it is quite regular—only that it is founded on a new principle, namely that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables.' We say nothing of the monstrous assurance of any man coming forward coolly at this time of day, and telling the reader of English poetry, whose ear has been tuned to the lays of Spenser, Milton, Dryden and Pope, that he makes his metre

‘on a new principle,” but we utterly deny the truth of the assertion, and defy him to show us *any* principle upon which the lines can be conceived to tally. We give two or three specimens, to confound at once this miserable piece of coxcombry and shuffling.’

‘Christabel’ lay many years in manuscript before its publication in 1816—the first part being written in 1797, and the second part in 1800. In the interval, the poem was read to nearly all the leading poets of the age. Scott’s friend Stoddart, among others, heard it, and being (unluckily for Coleridge) endowed with a remarkably retentive memory, he repeated the poem, or part of it, to Scott. The result was that Scott at once set about the writing of romantic stories in octosyllabics with anapæstic variations. Byron also imitated Coleridge in his substitution of accentual for syllabic scansion. It had therefore become necessary that Coleridge should establish his right to be considered the originator, not the copyist, of the innovated method. On the preface in which he attempted to do this, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* said :

‘Mr. Coleridge might have spared himself the trouble of anticipating the charge of “plagiarism or of servile imitation ;” it is a perfectly original composition, and the like of it is not to be found in the English language. The metre of the poem, the author gravely tells the public, “is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so.” . . . If we were called upon seriously to investigate this new principle, we could soon show the folly of it ; but really, gravely to discuss so wretched a performance is beneath the dignity of criticism.’

On the ‘sublime inconclusiveness’ of ‘Christabel,’ the same critic has the following :

‘Thus ends this poem—that is, all that is at present printed. But in his preface the author threatens us with *three more parts*. It is to be hoped, however, that he will think better of it, and not attempt to put his threat into execution. . . . In truth, a more senseless, absurd, and stupid composition has scarcely of late years issued from the press. Yet it is not, we are surprised to learn, a *hasty* composition; the first part of it having been written eighteen years, and the second, eight years ago! (*sic*). That a man, at any time when he had not his sober senses about him, might commit such balderdash to paper is conceivable; but that after it had been thrown by for so many years, he should calmly look over it, and deliberately resolve to give it to the public, is scarcely credible!’

‘Kubla Khan’ fared scarcely better than ‘Christabel.’ The *Examiner* said of it :

“‘Kubla Khan,’ we think, only shows that Mr. Coleridge can write better *nonsense* verses than any man in England.’

The *Edinburgh* gave the following account of the poem, and how it came to be written :

‘Mr. Coleridge was in bad health—the particular disease is not given, but the careful reader will form his own conjectures. He took an anodyne which threw him into a deep sleep in his chair (whether after dinner or not he omits to state), “at the moment that he was reading a sentence in Purchas’s ‘Pilgrims, relative to a palace of Kubla Khan.” The effects of the anodyne and the sentence together were prodigious; they produced the “curiosity” now before us. . . . The lines here given smell strongly, it must be owned, of the anodyne.’

The *Anti-Jacobin Review*, however, began to relent, after disposing of the greater work :

‘These (“Kubla Khan” and “The Pains of Sleep”) have none of the wildness and deformity of “Christabel,” and though they are not marked by any striking beauties, they are not wholly discreditable to the author’s talents.’

It is hard to believe that the ‘Kubla Khan’ spoken

of in these articles is the poem of which a poet in our day has said :

‘In reading it we seem rapt into that paradise revealed to Swedenborg, where music and colour and perfume were one, where you could hear the hues and see the harmonies of heaven. For absolute melody and splendour it were hardly rash to call it the first poem in the language.’*

It must surely be allowed that the adverse criticism on ‘Christabel’ and ‘Kubla Khan’ which is here quoted is outside all tolerant treatment, whether of raillery or of banter. It is difficult to attribute such false verdict to pure and absolute ignorance. Even when we make all due allowance for the prejudices of critics whose only possible enthusiasm went out to ‘the pointed and fine propriety of Pope,’ we can hardly believe that the exquisite art which is among the most valued of our possessions could encounter so much garrulous abuse without the criminal intervention of personal malignancy. He who chooses to follow up the trace we indicate, in the periodical literature of the period, will, we fear, find his research but too well rewarded. The story of Jeffrey’s visit to Coleridge at Keswick, told in the ‘*Biographia Literaria*,’ and in an initialed note to an article in the *Edinburgh* for 1817, and commented upon in *Blackwood* of October, 1817, will be found to serve the purposes of the stern-lamp of a ship, which (as Coleridge said of the uses of experience) casts its light only on the path that is past. Perhaps, however, the lovers of this author can afford to believe that possibly there was something in the aroma which

* Mr. Swinburne : ‘*Essays*.’

adhered to his few creations that was honestly offensive to persons accustomed by long habit to inhale only the atmosphere that gathered about an effete art, since dead and buried. Certainly there were many indications in those early critiques that the 'illustrious obscure', who pronounced this poetry mere raving and madness, the jingling of incoherent words, expressive only of extravagance and incongruity, must have pleaded guilty to the impeachment of knowing little or nothing of so pure a thing as genuine poetry. This is perhaps a hard judgment, but it can easily be shown to be a just one. It cannot be forgotten that the *Edinburgh* put Warton's sonnets ahead of Milton's, and in a gratuitous computation of relative poetic importance placed Campbell, Rogers, Montgomery, and Crabbe before Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats. What wonder that such critics should think it fair treatment to quote separate lines of a poem in support of their petulant diatribes? It can no longer be accounted rash to say that each line of 'Christabel' is scarcely less than faultless, both in emotion and metrical movement, when taken together with the rest; but the too transparent and altogether intolerable artifice of detaching single lines from the whole body of the poem enabled critics to go the astounding length of appearing to prove (incredible as it sounds), that the witch Geraldine was intended to represent a man who had seduced Christabel, after getting drunk with her. But this bears no further comment, and admits of no citation.

More depreciatory, perhaps, if that be possible, certainly more brutal, than the celebrated *Edinburgh* article on the 'Biographia Literaria' (attributed to Hazlitt by his contemporaries, and claimed for him by his biographer), was the review of the same book that opened the second volume (Oct. 1817) of *Blackwood*. Having said that, considered merely in a literary point of view, 'the work is most execrable,' and that without benefiting the cause either of virtue, knowledge, or religion, it exhibits many mournful sacrifices of personal dignity, after which it seems impossible that Mr. Coleridge can be greatly respected either by the public or himself, the reviewer abandons further restraint, and gives way to his unamiable impulses in the following choice outburst :

'It is impossible to read many pages of this work without thinking that Mr. Coleridge conceives himself to be a far greater man than the public is likely to admit ; and we wish to waken him from what seems to us a most ludicrous delusion. He seems to believe that every tongue is wagging in his praise—that every ear is open to imbibe the oracular breathings of his inspiration. Even when he would fain convince us that his soul is wholly occupied with some other illustrious character, he breaks out into laudatory exclamations concerning himself ; no sound is so sweet to him as that of his own voice ; the ground is hallowed on which his footsteps tread, and there seems to him something more than human in his very shadow. He will read no books that other people read ; his scorn is as misplaced and extravagant as his admiration ; opinions that seem to tally with his own wild ravings are holy and inspired, and, unless agreeable to his creed, the wisdom of ages is folly ; and wits, whom the world worship, are dwarfed when they approach his venerable side. His admiration of nature and of man, we had almost said his religious feeling toward his God, are all narrowed, weakened and corrupted, and poisoned by inveterate and diseased egotism ; and instead of his mind reflecting the beauty

and glory of nature, he seems to consider the mighty universe itself as nothing better than a mirror in which, with a grinning and idiot self-complacency, he may contemplate the physiognomy of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Though he has done nothing in any one department of human knowledge, yet he speaks of his theories, and plans, and views, and discoveries, as if he had produced some memorable revolution in science. He at all times connects his name in poetry with Shakespeare, and Spenser, and Milton ; in politics with Burke, and Fox, and Pitt ; in metaphysics with Locke, and Hartley, and Berkeley, and Kant—feeling himself not only to be worthy compeer of those illustrious spirits, but to unite, in his own mighty intellect, all the glorious powers and faculties by which they were separately distinguished, as if his soul were endowed with all human power, and was the depository of the aggregate, or rather the essence of all human knowledge. So deplorable a delusion as this has only been equalled by that of Joanna Southcote, who mistook a complaint in the bowels for the divine afflatus, and believed herself about to give birth to the regenerator of the world, when sick unto death of an incurable and loathsome disease.’

After the statement that though in London literary society Mr. Coleridge is well known and admired for his extraordinary loquacity—at least within a little circle of admirers, whose foolish babbling he mistakes for the voice of the world—it is remarked (as proof of a higher intelligence existing north of the Tweed, not as evidence of a lower culture in that quarter) that in Scotland few people know or care anything about him ; that few know how to spell or pronounce his name, and that were he to drop from the clouds in that northern region, he would find it impossible to make any intelligent communication respecting himself ; for of him and his writings there would prevail only a perplexing dream, or the most untroubled ignorance. Oblivious of the questionable credit attaching to such boasting, the reviewer next

says that he cannot see that the state of literature would have been different if Coleridge had been cut off in his childhood, or had never been born, for he has done nothing worthy remembrance, excepting only a few wild and fantastical ballads which he has scattered around him as sibylline leaves, with as majestic an air as if a crowd of enthusiastic admirers were rushing forward to grasp the divine promulgations, 'instead of their being (as in fact they are) coldly received by the accidental passenger, like a lying lottery puff or a quack advertisement.' Then follows a long statement of the principal events of Coleridge's literary life, and this is throughout set in so new a light that readers might easily fail to recognise it. The statement in question leads up to the assurance, advanced in the utmost confidence by the reviewer, that 'All good men, of all parties, regard Mr. Coleridge with pity and contempt.' The story of the visit to Klopstock is re-told with added humour, and the story of the smoking at Birmingham is repeated with subtracted decency. The writer can 'conceive nothing more odious and brutal than two young ignorant lads from Cambridge forcing themselves upon the retirement of this illustrious old man,' and instead of listening with love, admiration and reverence to his sentiments and opinions, 'insolently obtruding upon him their own crude and mistaken fancies.' The 'folly and insolence' of Wordsworth on this occasion are especially provocative of the reviewer's wrath. As to the meeting at the house of the 'Brummagem Patriot,' it would appear that Mr. Coleridge 'got dead-drunk

of strong ale and tobacco,' and in that pitiable state was exposed, with all the 'staring stupidity of his lamentable condition,' to the derision of his disciples.

In the early part of this year (1817) the *Examiner* published a letter signed 'Vindex,' which may be understood to be a rejoinder to Coleridge's defence of Southey in the 'Biographia Literaria.'

'The author of the "Friend" is troubled at times and seasons with a treacherous memory ; but perhaps he *may* remember a visit to Bristol. He *may* remember (I allude to no confidential whisperings, no unguarded private moments, but to facts of open and ostentatious notoriety)—he may remember, *publicly*, before several strangers, and in the midst of a public library, turning into the most merciless ridicule "the dear Friend" whom he now calls Southey the Philologist, "Southey the Historian," Southey the Poet of Thalaba, the Madoc, and the Roderic. Mr. Coleridge recited an ode of his' dear Friend, in the hearing of these persons, with a tone and manner of the most contemptuous burlesque, and accused him of having stolen from Wordsworth images which he knew not how to use. Does he remember that he also took down the "Joan of Arc," and recited, in the same ridiculous tone (I do not mean his *usual* tone, but one which he meant should be ridiculous), more than a page of the poem, with the ironical comment, "*This, gentlemen, is poetry*" ? Does he remember that he then recited, by way of contrast, some forty lines of his own contribution to the poem, in his usual bombastic manner ? and that after this disgusting display of egotism and malignity, he observed, "Poor fellow, he may be a *Reviewer*, but Heaven bless the man if he thinks himself a *Poet*" ?

"Absentem qui rodit amicum
Hic *niger est* : hunc tu Romane caveto."

The assaults of criticism in Coleridge's case were not confined in their range within the narrow limits of his work. He could have borne to be told that his poetry was 'intolerable balderdash,' and that his prose

was obscure to persons who (as Goethe says of all such critics) might have found the plainest writing illegible in the darkness of their own minds. But to find flung in his face the brand of domestic infidelity, carrying the shameful allegation that he had left 'his poor children fatherless, and his wife destitute,' was more than he could always patiently endure. 'If,' he says, 'it were worth while to mix together, as ingredients, half of what I know to be true, concerning the character, qualifications and motives of our anonymous critics, whose decisions are oracles for our reading public, I might safely borrow the words of the apocryphal Daniel : "*Give me leave and I will slay this dragon without sword or staff;*" for the compound would be as "*the pitch and fat and hair which Daniel took and did seethe them together, and make lumps thereof, and put into the dragon's mouth, and so the dragon burst in sunder; and Daniel said, LO, THESE ARE THE GODS YE WORSHIP!*"'

The closing years of Coleridge's life were not marked by any special effort. The celebrated 'Hazlitt' review of the 'Biographia Literaria' (Edinburgh, 1817) is too well known to require that extensive excerpts should be made from it. We can perhaps content ourselves with a passage which may be considered representative of its general tone. This, then, is the 'grasp of the powerful hand' which, according to *Blackwood*, had at an earlier date crumpled up the poet's 'vile verses like so much waste paper.'

'The cant of Morality, like the cant of Methodism, comes in most naturally to close the scene ; and as the regenerated sinner

keeps alive his old raptures and newly-acquired horrors, by anticipating endless ecstasies or endless tortures in another world, so our disappointed demagogue keeps up that "pleasurable poetic fervour" which has been the cordial and the bane of his existence, by indulging his maudlin egotism and his mawkish spleen in fulsome eulogies of his own virtues and nauseous abuse of his contemporaries—in making excuses for doing nothing himself, and assigning bad motives for what others have done. Till he can do something better, we would rather hear no more of him.'

And they did hear no more of him, at all events until 1834, when to the merited confusion of all quacks in criticism, periodicals of every kind, daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly, teemed—as they can teem only once or twice in a hundred years—with announcements of the death and records of the career of one of the great writers of the century.

Nor were *Blackwood* and the *Edinburgh* ashamed to join the chorus of applause. If it were worth while to set over against the passages just quoted, wherein reputable critics exhibit their contempt of common justice, the rhapsodies of praise which were afterwards poured forth on the same subject in the same journals, such a contrast of the earlier and later utterances would perhaps display their contempt of common decency. Even when we make all proper allowance for that change of conviction which none of us consider reprehensible, and when we remember that the conflicting opinions were in many cases the products of different pens, we have only shifted the point of our attack: we have only added another to our list of the abuses that disgrace and endanger the principle of anonymity in

the press. That principle has retained its hold so long from the humiliating circumstance that the public memory is so short. On no other ground can we account for the fact that a journal having any pretensions to consistency of teaching can survive the degradation of being obliged by force of public opinion to publish under a single editorial regime, and within a score of years, articles involving a total reversal of its critical verdicts. We have seen how in 1817 *Blackwood* said Coleridge had done nothing worthy of remembrance: what must we say when we find that in allusion to the insufficient recognition received by the poet at that and an earlier period the same journal tells its public in 1834 that 'the poets themselves knew right well, and so did almost all the poetical mind in England, that there was not within the four seas a brighter genius than Coleridge?' We have read what *Blackwood* said in 1817 of the untroubled ignorance in which the intelligent part of the world lay respecting those wild and fantastic ballads, those sibylline leaves, that were coldly received by the accidental passenger like a lying lottery puff, or a quack advertisement: what shall we think when in *Blackwood* for 1834 we read that 'despite all the assaults of malice,' the sweet, soft, still breath of praise, like that of purest incense, arose from many a secret place, where genius and sensibility abided; and Coleridge, amidst the simpers of the silly, and the laughter of the light, and the scorn of the callous, and the abuse of the brutal, and the blackguardism of the

beggar-poor—received the laurel crown woven by the hands of the best of his brother bards—and wore it ever afterwards cheerfully, but without pride, round his lofty forehead—and it was green as ever the day he died? We have heard what *Blackwood* said in 1817 of the extraordinary loquacity which helped Coleridge, within the little circle of his babbling admirers, to regard the mighty universe as itself nothing better than a mirror in which to contemplate with a grinning and idiot self-complacency his own physiognomy: what shall we say when we read in *Blackwood* of 1834 that Coleridge ‘alone perhaps of all men that ever lived was always a poet—in all his moods, and they were many, inspired;’ that his genius ‘never seemed to burn low, to need fuel or fanning;’ that his waking thoughts had ‘all the vividness of visions, all the variousness of dreams;’ that his conversational displays, ‘spontaneous as breathing,’ were the ‘only eloquence . . . ever heard that deserved the name?’ What in view of such contradictions shall we think and say? What indeed, but that the latter utterances, equally with the earlier ones, are valueless, as the opinion of a journal wherein private enmity in the one case, and personal friendliness in the other, hid itself behind the mask of anonymous criticism? It is no part of the present purpose to set the adverse opinions of Coleridge’s genius which were published during the poet’s lifetime in contrast with the laudatory ones which found expression after his death; but in order to see at their worst what Coleridge himself called ‘the Cerberean whelps of fury and slander,’ we may

with profit glance at the volumes of the *Edinburgh* for 1816 and 1835. We have already heard how in the earlier year the journal in question pronounced 'Christabel' 'one of the most notable pieces of impertinence of which the press has lately been guilty,' a 'thing' 'utterly destitute of value,' exhibiting 'from beginning to end not a ray of genius.' Let those say who are best masters of the recreant art of eating their own words how it is possible to tolerate such graceless penance as this, which appeared in the *Edinburgh* for 1835 :

'Coleridge learnt little from others, and brought out the principles and elements of his compositions, both in prose and poetry, from the stores of his own singular genius. . . . The supernatural imagery of his 'Christabel,' for example, is something of a peculiar and exquisite cast, which stands unrivalled in modern poetry. By the side of the mysterious Geraldine, the familiar spirits of Scott and Byron seem as corporeal and robust as the sturdy theatrical ghost which used to occupy the chair of Banquo at Macbeth's haunted feast.'

Explanation—not, certainly, of the journalistic inconsistency—but of the earlier and more insensate attack, is readily obtainable. In the concluding chapter of the 'Biographia Literaria,' Coleridge tells us that during the many years which intervened between the composition and the publication of 'Christabel,' it became almost as well known among literary men as if it had been on common sale; the same references were made to it, and the same liberties were taken with it. 'Year after year,' he says, 'and in societies of the most different kinds, I had been entreated to recite it; and the result was still the same in all. . . . This was before publication.'

And since then,' he adds, 'with very few exceptions, I have heard nothing but abuse, and this, too, in a spirit of bitterness at least as disproportionate to the pretensions of the poem, had it been the most pitiaibly below mediocrity, as the previous eulogies, and far more inexplicable. In the *Edinburgh Review* it was assailed with a malignity and a spirit of personal hatred that ought to have injured only the work in which such a tirade was suffered to appear; and this review was generally attributed (whether rightly or not I know not) to a man, who both in my presence and in my absence, has repeatedly pronounced it the finest poem of its kind in the language.' Few readers will doubt that the man here pointed at is the same who was subsequently chosen to review in the same quarter the 'Biographia Literaria' itself. If Coleridge's conjecture were a good one as to the identity of his critic, that person was one who at the beginning of his career owed everything to the poet—one who supported his attenuated intellect mainly on the crumbs that fell from the great man's table, and who was consequently chargeable not only with gross and palpable insincerity, but with deliberate and shameless lying and subornation.

Fortunately Coleridge himself was as little affected as it was possible for man to be by these malignant lampoons, which in their contempt of humanity and even of decency were calculated to endanger the liberty of the press. 'I can truly say,' he writes, 'that the grief with which I read this rhapsody of predetermined insult had the rhapsodist himself for its whole

and sole object, and that the indignant contempt which it excited in me was as exclusively confined to his employer.'

Two only of the many charges urged against Coleridge during his lifetime deserve attention now. One of them is of the nature of a personal accusation ; the other concerns the poet's literary character alone. It was, as we have seen, again and again remarked with every variety of gibe, banter, and sneer, that Coleridge, as a man, was an overweening egotist. He was accused of connecting his own name in poetry with the names of Shakspeare, Spenser, and Milton, and of talking of himself as a philosopher, as if he were a worthy compeer of Berkeley, Locke and Hartley. That he observed a resemblance in his own eyes to the eyes in the picture of Lessing, which he saw at Klopstock's ; that he disputed the supremacy of Goethe, and that he offered gratuitous and humiliating advice to Tennyson, seemed to the writers of his time and to some writers since then, to denote a condition of mind which could only be described as morbid egotism. Now, granted that a habit of self-reverence is a mark of egotism, there remains the contention that it is egotism of the most innocent description ; and this is so even when that habit of self-reference busies itself but little with what tends to humiliate the spirit of the egotist, and occupies itself largely with what distends his pride. Egotism as a metaphysical disease is broadly divisible into two sorts of distemper ; the one wholly harmless and even sometimes salutary, the other entirely baneful and often fatal. First,

there is that principle of self-love which gives to every person and thing its due place, and elevates itself by association with the highest ; and next, there is that other principle of self-love which seeks to subordinate everything to itself. The latter is by no means an aggravated form of the former ; it will be seen to be a distinct malady.

With the former kind of egotism Coleridge was throughout chargeable. He shirked nothing of the admiration proper to great work of whatever description, and he did not hesitate to couple his own doings with the highest of their several kinds, even as he was too true an artist to seek any model save the best. He had that unsatisfied yearning after unattainable excellence which belongs to the finest spirits, and he had also that restful confidence in himself which is always a part—even if sometimes an unconscious or concealed part—of a great nature. Having passed the rubicon of his own constant criticism, he knew his value, and did not attempt to hide his sense of it. Thus far he was indubitably an egotist ; but he was such an egotist as Shakspeare was in his 55th sonnet ; as Michael Drayton was in his ‘Polyolbion ;’ as Milton was in his opening to the third book of ‘Paradise Lost ;’ as Pope was in the ‘Dunciad ;’ as Burns was when he settled his rank in his own mind, before the public had pronounced in his favour ; as Wordsworth was in ignoring present reputation, and writing with ‘the light of Heaven’ upon him for posterity ; as Campbell was in writing so little ‘from fear of the shadow’ of his own distinction ; as Keats was when he foretold the

certainly that he should take a place among English poets. There is nothing baneful in the self-consciousness of genius. Genius always is self-conscious. Those who doubt that it is so usually tell us the story of the two physicians who sat discussing the human system in the presence of a burly farmer. On some moot-point each had given the result of his personal experience and observation, when their robust companion interrupted them with a startling disclosure: 'For my part, gentlemen, I have no system.' He had the best system of them all. The highest physical health is certainly unconscious of itself; but not so the highest intellectual power. The body cannot contemplate itself: the mind can do so. That Coleridge knew his own worth in the world is no impeachment of his character if the annunciation of that knowledge was not offensive. That other men mistake their place is only a matter for ridicule, when the deplorable delusion does in fact resemble that of the Joanna Southcote to whom *Blackwood* likened Coleridge.

If Coleridge's personal claim was, in fact, as large as his detractors represented, it has been more than justified by the tribute of the best minds of his own time and later times. 'I am grieved,' writes Southey, that you never met Coleridge; all other men whom I have ever known are mere children to him.' 'His fancy and diction,' says Scott, 'would long ago have placed him above all his contemporaries had they been under the direction of a sound judgment and a steady will.' 'He is,' said De Quincey, 'the largest and most spacious intellect,

the subtlest and most comprehensive that has yet existed among men.' 'Impiety to Shakspeare!' cries Landor touching this rhapsody of the Opium Eater; 'treason to Milton! I give up all the rest, even Bacon. Certainly, since their day we have had nothing at all comparable to him. Byron and Scott were but as gunflints to a granite mountain; Wordsworth has one angle of resemblance.'

By the other and more dangerous form of the malady of the egotist Coleridge was assuredly untainted. No diagnosis of the distemper can be better than his own. In a preface to his poems he says, 'There is one species of egotism which is truly disgusting; not that which leads us to communicate our feelings to others, but that which would reduce the feelings of others to an identity with our own. The atheist who exclaims, "Pshaw!" when he glances his eye on the praises of the Deity, is an egotist; an old man, when he speaks contemptuously of love verses, is an egotist.' This is the egotism with which we are constantly rubbing shoulders in the walks of daily life. It is that mental *choræa* of which Emerson speaks, in which the patient continues to spin round on one spot. We meet with it in the railway trains, where some Dogberry who is in broadcloth blusters; we see it in the pulpit, where some Malvolio who is not in cross-garters smirks; we encounter it in journalism, where some Nick Bottom has not yet realized what change has come over him since he was translated. It is not Coleridge's egotism, but the egotism of his first critics.

The heavy accusation which has been brought against Coleridge's literary character, that of obscurity, has an appearance of justice to recommend it. A certain turgidness of diction with a profusion of newly-coined double epithets did, as he allowed, cause many passages of his best work in prose and verse to acquire a degree of indefiniteness, which explained, if it did not justify, Hazlitt's picture of Coleridge's mind as 'a world of vapours, unhealthy, unsubstantial, with gorgeous tints and ever-varying forms.' That there is in some of Coleridge's best verses—the 'Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni,' the 'Ode to the Departing Year,' and the 'Ode to France'—an occasional cloud of smoke whose 'turbulence is not grandeur,' no judicious lover of the poet will be anxious to deny. It is easy for the imagination to be led captive by the mere mistiness that surrounds an uncertain object and magnifies it. Wordsworth used to tell a story touching some lines by Campbell, which he considered sheer nonsense, and nothing more than a poetical indigestion. Once, at his house, Professor Wilson having repeated the lines in question with the emphasis of admiration, a sensible and accomplished lady who happened to be present begged him to explain to her their meaning. Wilson was extremely angry, recited the lines again and declared that they were splendid. 'Well, sir,' said the lady, '*but what do they mean?*' Dashing the book on the floor, he exclaimed in his broad Scotch accent, 'I'll be daumed if I can tell!' There are those of us who, though far from resting under the suspicion of dis-

loyalty to Coleridge, are in Professor Wilson's position with respect to some of this poet's lines. But here Coleridge is on common ground with every great writer, and the proportion of his work which will not yield a meaning in return for attention and sympathy is probably as small in his case as in that of Milton, or yet Shakspeare. Coleridge's own defence against the accusation of obscurity is this :

'An author is obscure when his conceptions are dim and imperfect, and his language incorrect or inappropriate, or involved. A poem that abounds in allusions, like 'The Bard' of Gray, or one that impersonates high and abstract truths, like Collins's 'Ode on the Poetical Character,' claims not to be popular, but should be acquitted of obscurity. The deficiency is in the reader. But this is a charge which every poet, whose imagination is warm and rapid, must expect from his *contemporaries*. Milton did not escape it ; and it was adduced with virulence against Gray and Collins. We now hear no more of it ; not that their poems are better understood at present than they were at their first publication ; but their fame is established, and a critic would accuse himself of frigidity or inattention who should profess not to understand them.'

Perhaps a better form of defence was shadowed forth in the opening pages of the 'Biographia Literaria,' where the poet says that satisfied as he had been that the thoughts, such as they were, could not have been expressed otherwise, or at least more perspicuously, he forgot to inquire whether the thoughts themselves did not demand a degree of attention unsuitable to the nature and objects of poetry. This no doubt touches the right trace where any alleged obscurity of Coleridge's poetry is in question. The theses and terms that are applicable to practical chemistry would probably be found impenetrably

obscure in practical mechanics. In his 'Religious Musings,' and 'Fears in Solitude,' Coleridge perhaps made the mistake of a wrong choice of subjects for poetic treatment, of 'desiring to give a poetic colouring to abstract and metaphysical truths,' and a measure of obscurity was the inevitable result of the error.

With the yet heavier accusation against Coleridge of literary plagiarism it is not within our purpose to deal. The charge was made after the poet's death, and that alone puts it beyond our province. But neither De Quincey, who advanced it, nor Julius Hare, who replied to it, could say much more or much less as to the nature or extent of the appropriations in dispute than Coleridge himself had said in anticipation of one of the many items in the subsequent indictment :

'For readers in general,' he says, 'let whatever shall be found in this or any future work of mine that resembles or coincides with the doctrine of my German predecessor, though contemporary, be wholly attributed to him, provided that the absence of direct reference to his books, which I could not at all times make with truth, as designating citations or thoughts actually derived from him, and which I trust would, after this general acknowledgment, be superfluous, be not charged on me as an ungenerous concealment or intentional plagiarism.'

When all is said that can be said about Coleridge's literary obligations and the acknowledgment of them, there remain the facts that thought is not traditional, and that what Coleridge took from Milton, from Klopstock, from Goethe, and from Schelling, is less than any of these had taken—less than he himself took—from Homer, and Bacon, and Shakspeare.

Coleridge cannot be said to have founded a school, either in poetry or in philosophy. Nevertheless, he must have been of all men one of the most magnetic and awakening. He has left a great following. It may reasonably be questioned if his influence on the thought of our own time is second to that of any man whatever. He lived a twofold intellectual life. His was, in its best and happiest moments, a bright and beautiful genius, though it got too often hidden away among the mazes of more mysticism than his age could master.

Why did he produce so little? Was it, as Southey said, because his powers were palsied by a total want of moral strength that he left nothing to justify to the world the opinions of the friends who shrank not from linking his name with the greatest names in the literature? Scott likened him to a lump of coal, rich in gas, which lay expending itself in puffs and gleams, and no shrewd body could clap it into a cast-iron box, and compel the compressed element to do itself justice. Why was the sweet singer silent save for six out of sixty years? We know not—perhaps, as a critic in *Blackwood* of 1834 truly said, it is far better for us we do not know—what is happening in one another's hearts. Perhaps Coleridge was not ambitious; perhaps despondency too often dimmed the visions that passed before him. Beginning to write about 1795, he ceased for practical purposes when the literary life was published in 1816. What stayed his hand we cannot say in a word or two, but surely there is nothing in poetry more profoundly affecting

than those lines written in 1827, in which, as an old man, he looks back on the opportunities that are lost to him with the youth that is lost : in which he seems to see from afar, and as from a high mountain, the land of promise he may never enter.

WORK WITHOUT HOPE.

All Nature seems at work. Slugs leave their lair—
The bees are stirring—birds are on the wing—
And Winter, slumbering in the open air,
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring !
And I, the while, the sole unbusy thing,
Nor honey make, nor pair, nor build, nor sing.

Yet well I ken the banks where amaranths blow,
Have traced the fount whence streams of nectar flow.
Bloom, O ye amaranths ! bloom for whom ye may,
For me ye bloom not ! Glide, rich streams, away !
With lips unbrightened, wreathless brow, I stroll ;
And would you learn the spells that drowse my soul ?
WORK WITHOUT HOPE draws nectar in a sieve,
And HOPE without an object cannot live.

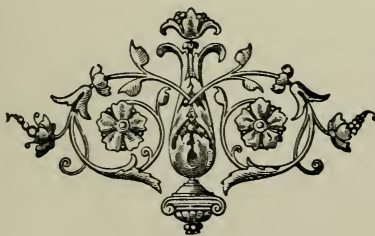
Not with lips unbrightened or with wreathless brow, nevertheless. Solemn and terrible, indeed, is the reflection—serving to show that labour is in truth the law of life—that for every nearest duty which we permit to fall aside neglected, some power goes from us of performing whatever duties remain, until in the end, whether we be the least or the greatest of mortals, there may have fallen from our graspless hand every task and every opportunity, until life may have lost its work, and work its hope, and hope its object, and we stand, under the Great Taskmaster's eye, weighed down with the burden of the talents we can no longer use.

What was said in an earlier chapter on the philo-

sophy of the antagonistic relations of Wordsworth and his first critics, is broadly applicable to Coleridge and his critics also. There is a noteworthy point of difference, nevertheless. The head and front of Coleridge's offending against received canons of taste in poetry, was a much deeper thing than a change of expressional medium. It concerned his imaginative faculty. The workings of Wordsworth's imagination were in much closer accord with accepted ideas as to the functions of the imagination than was the case with Coleridge. Perhaps Wordsworth was not in the strictest and highest sense an imaginative poet at all, though, as a critic* has said, his magnificent image of Time and Death under the yew-tree is worthy of any imaginative poet whatever. Imagination is a thing almost wholly self-inclusive: primarily it goes to work upon itself. Now Wordsworth's mind never went to work on its own vision. Sir Henry Taylor has well observed that the mind of this poet required always an impulse from without to send it far into regions of thought. In all this, Wordsworth was at one with Pope and the poets of the school preceding his own, but he was wholly in antagonism with Coleridge, than whom no poet, perhaps, since Shakespeare possessed so much purely imaginative ardour, or was so little dependent for his effects upon the sensuous promptings of eye and ear. Well, as a result of the exercise of his *self-inclusive* imaginative faculty, Coleridge produced works which were in the full sense of the word creations. Nothing like the 'Ancient

* *Athenæum*, May 27, 1882.

Mariner,' 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan' had existed before them. They were sheer mid-day poetic witchery. They could be judged by no rules except such as they formulated for themselves. They sprang forth obedient to no accepted laws of inception. What wonder that, with so little that was in harmony with known and prescribed taste, they seemed to those who first read them to run riot in a lawless freedom. Nevertheless, we now perceive that the 'wild and original' genius that produced them was submissive to an instinct as unyieldingly exact as that which gave unity, harmony, and naturalness to the 'wood-notes wild' of Shakespeare himself. It is instructive to witness the difficulty critics found in recognising this fact. It may be said to be the greatest fact of all in the development of what is called the neo-romantic movement.



‘THE SATANIC SCHOOL.’



BYRON.

ALTHOUGH Byron is hardly more than half a century dead, it is scarcely possible that we can know what he was to his contemporaries. We could as easily guess what Goethe was to the youth of his 'Werther' days ; or Schiller to the Leipsic students, who were fired by the spirit of revolt in his 'Robbers.' Perhaps it is as well that this is so—as well that half a century should have removed all personal encrustations, leaving only the rift of the ore of poetry to be weighed out as the poet's guerdon of praise and blame. Yet it seems difficult even at this distance of time to mark out Byron's place in literature without regard for his private history : so much of all he wrote is wrapped up with the brief, brilliant, unhappy life he lived.

Perhaps, therefore, it was by the exercise of that ingenuity which spends itself in classification (ingenuity that too frequently yields delight, not so much by any direct discovery, as by skill in surmounting collateral difficulties that had better never been overcome) that

Macaulay assigned definite rank to Byron in these terms :

‘He belonged half to the old and half to the new school of poetry. His personal taste led him to the former ; his thirst of praise to the latter ; his talents were equally suited to both. . . . Lord Byron was the mediator between two generations, between two hostile poetical sects. Though always sneering at Mr. Wordsworth, he was yet, though perhaps unconsciously, the interpreter between Mr. Wordsworth and the multitude. . . . Lord Byron founded what may be called an exoteric Lake School. What Mr. Wordsworth had said like a recluse, Lord Byron said like a man of the world, with less profound feeling, but with more perspicuity, energy, and conciseness.’

Few readers will find it hard to disturb Macaulay’s theory. If Byron’s taste led him to the old school of poetry, his ambition must have approved its impulse, for out of the ‘pointed and fine propriety of Pope’ was formulated the leading canon of taste in his day. If thirst of praise inclined the poet to the new school of poetry, what possible assurance could he have of its ever being gratified in his lifetime? Wordsworth was the most unpopular of all poets, and toiled daily, as Byron could never have toiled, on a work which he knew must be ridiculed, and which he knew must be immortal. If Byron was the mediator between two hostile poetical sects, and the interpreter (however unconsciously) of Wordsworth to the multitude, how did it come about that there never was any tangible sympathy between the men themselves, who surely (in amiable moments at least) might have been expected to guess at their affinity? Wordsworth probably thought Byron the evil power incarnate, and Byron brought his whole soul to the task of retorting sneer for sneer. If the secret of Byron’s early popu-

larity lay in his art of saying as a man of the world what Wordsworth said as a recluse, how is it that Byron's popularity has not lasted in all its first splendour until now, when perspicuity, energy, and conciseness are (as they always have been) more in requisition than profound feeling? Byron's genius refuses to be classified. It is because his poetry is wrapped up with his life, that we cannot consider the one without reference to the other. And Byron must suffer by this thrusting together of inimical elements, for *now* they are inimical. The enthusiasm has gone out of our estimate of his character: we weep no longer with his wrongs, burn no longer with his loves, and no longer know the sway of his gloomy egotism. The misanthropic colouring with which he invested all his imaginary heroes—Harold, Conrad, Lara, Giaour—has lost much of its serpentine fascination. We now follow Byron no more into those darkest coverts that he inhabits on the 'night-side' of human nature; nor are we thrilled by the dimmed lustre of his feverish passion. Nay, already we are not a little weary of his irrepressible self-reference; weary of his egotism, weary of his querulousness, of his unconscious masquerade, of his sincere despair. And signs are not wanting that we are apt to undervalue the poetry as the consequence of this altered attitude towards the man. Byron must suffer, as we say, by this thrusting together of his work and the dead shadow of his life.

It was not a sceptre of straw that Byron wielded, though his rule was aided by a vague personal

despotism. Yet, in order to determine how far he was wronged by his critics, we must consider both the poetry and the poet.

He sprang from an ancient and noble house, impoverished by the notorious excesses of his ancestors. Like his own Lara, he was

‘Left by his sire, too young such loss to know,
Lord of himself,—that heritage of woe.’

The unpropitious environments into which he was born led him—even while still a boy—into dreamy self-communion, and his was a nature that a habit of introspection did not suit. Genius alone, when it is such as his, too often saddens the days of its wayward heirs. His first book, ‘Poems on Various Occasions,’ afterwards known as ‘Hours of Idleness’ (1807), feeble enough in most respects, was lashed with a severity which no juvenile performance could entirely deserve. This is a part of the text of the celebrated review published in the *Edinburgh* in 1808 :

‘The poesy of this young lord belongs to the class which neither gods nor men are said to permit. . . . His effusions are spread over a dead flat, and can no more get above or below the level than if they were so much stagnant water. As an extenuation of this offence, the noble author is peculiarly forward in pleading minority. We have it in the title-page and on the very back of the volume ; it follows his name like a favourite part of his style. . . . Now the law on the point of minority we hold to be perfectly clear. It is a plea available only to the defendant ; no plaintiff can offer it as a supplementary ground of action. Thus, if any suit could be brought against Lord Byron, for the purpose of compelling him to put into court a certain quantity of poetry ; and if judgment were given against him, it is highly probable that an exception would be taken, were he to deliver for *poetry* the contents of this volume. To this he might plead *minority* ; but as he now

makes voluntary tender of the article, he hath no right to sue on that ground for the price in good current praise, should the goods be unmarketable. . . . Perhaps, however, in reality all that he tells us about his youth, is rather with a view to increase our wonder than to soften our censures. He possibly means to say, "See how a minor can write ! This poem was actually composed by a young man of eighteen, and this by one of only sixteen !" But, alas, we all remember the poetry of Cowley at ten and Pope at twelve. . . . He takes care to remember us of Dr. Johnson's saying, that when a nobleman appears as an author, his merit should be handsomely rewarded. In truth it is this consideration only that induces us to give Lord Byron's poems a place in our review, beside our desire to counsel him, that he do forthwith abandon poetry, and turn his talents, which are considerable, and his opportunities, which are great, to better account. . . .

'But whatever judgment may be passed on the poems of this noble minor, it seems we must take them as we find them, and be content ; for they are the last we shall ever have from him. . . . Therefore let us take what we get and be thankful. What right have we poor devils to be nice ? We are well off to have got so much from a man of this lord's station, who does not live in a garret, but "has the sway" of Newstead Abbey. Again, we say, let us be thankful ; and with honest Sancho, bid God bless the giver, nor look the gift horse in the mouth.'

Mr. J. C. Jeaffreson's theory ('The Real Lord Byron') that though the blow dealt at Byron in this article came from Edinburgh, the impulse of the blow came from Cambridge, where the poet was then residing, is ingenious. But Jeffrey's well-known repudiation of the authorship, taken together with the graphic, amusing and curiously learned exposition in the article itself, of 'the law on the point of morality,' are surely sufficient to criminate 'that venomous reptile Brougham whom Byron, years later, declared to be his 'only hate.

The article, as a whole, was a piece of comparatively harmless banter, not characterized by more

poetic insight than usually distinguished the periodical in which it appeared, and incomparably less heartless than many such on Wordsworth and Southey that had preceded it, and on Coleridge that succeeded it. But the young peer was wounded to the quick. Did he 'break a bloodvessel'? No; he 'sat down, drank three bottles of claret,' and proceeded to take his 'revenge in keen iambics.'* Perhaps it is impossible to say, without consideration of each individual case, in what spirit adverse criticism ought to be received. Some men lose by combativeness: some gain by it; Byron was one of the latter. The 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers' contained but little poetry; on the other hand, it contained much arrogant reprobation of excellent men, and manifested both in the body of the satire and in the patchwork notes so much insensibility to indisputable merit that much of the effect of its few just and spirited strictures was lost. But it asserted once for all the inextinguishable entity of its author. True, indeed, some critics regarded the satirist (whose name was at first left for whispers and conjectures—the little work being issued anonymously) rather less as an indignant censor than as a petulant schoolboy smarting almost

* Not the least interesting of Mr. Jeaffreson's statements is that the 'English Bards' was practically begun before the publication of the offensive *Edinburgh* article. Moore gives an extract from a letter written by Byron in 1807, in which reference is made to such a poem as being about to appear. This indefinite document was the ground of Moore's conjecture that the satire was conceived before the personal occasion for it had arisen; but Mr. Jeaffreson has seen Byronic papers which settle the matter conclusively.

to madness with his flagellation, 'blind with rage and anguish, and dealing out his indiscriminate revenge in kicks and blows preposterously excessive in malice and deficient in power.' This is what the *Eclectic Review* (1809) has about it :

'The world is said to be indebted for this effusion of "the milk of human kindness" to no less a personage than a certain Lord Byron, on no less an occasion than the discipline bestowed on the said lord for certain "Hours of Idleness" by the Busby hands of the Edinburgh Reviewers. This is just as it should be. For equitable discrimination, for devotedness to truth, for gentlemanly deportment, and the genuine Christian spirit of candour, amenity, forgiveness of injuries, and reluctance to inflict pain, the combatants are pretty fairly matched. The literary *canaille* will gaze on this game-cock spectacle with a delight which happily need not be diminished by any compunction for the cause, or apprehension for the consequences. If, however, the noble lord and the learned advocate have the courage requisite to sustain their mutual insults, we shall probably soon hear the explosion of another kind of *paper-war*, after the fashion of the ever memorable duel which the latter is said to have fought, or seemed to fight, with "Little Moore." . . . The utmost we can promise the noble lord is, that his wrath will be very entertaining to the public for several weeks to come ; by the end of that period, the same public will perhaps be called upon to deplore his fall in the field of honour, and it may be our melancholy office to criticize elegies on his untimely fate.'

Byron had taken his revenge ; he had turned the weapons of spleen against the just as well as the unjust ; he had (however unworthily) obtained his individual niche in the world of letters ; yet, when all was over, he could not persuade himself that the great world itself was not filled with persons who rejoiced in the insults that had been offered him. So, sucking the eggs of melancholy which his own heart had produced, he left his home and travelled in

Greece. For three years England was permitted to forget him ; but then came a spasmodic outburst of his muse. In 1812 he published the first and second cantos of the 'Pilgrimage of Childe Harold.' The poem was received everywhere with delight ; before its publication it was handed about the London drawing-rooms in advance sheets, and when it appeared, the daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly publications teemed with its praises. The *Edinburgh* four years previously had counselled Byron to abandon poetry and turn his talents to better account ; but even the northern critics could resist neither the impetuous passion of the poem, nor the social rage the poet generated. At the cost of eating their own words, they wrote :

'Lord Byron has improved marvellously since his last appearance at our tribunal : and this, though it bears a very affected title, is really a volume of very considerable power, spirit and originality—which not only atones for the evil work of his nonage, but gives promise of a further excellence hereafter ; to which it is quite comfortable to look forward. . . . The descriptions are often exceedingly good, and the diction, though unequal and frequently faulty, has on the whole a freedom, copiousness, and vigour which we are not sure that we could match in any contemporary poet.'

We know that there was great poetry in the poem, but the secret of its electrical popularity lay elsewhere than in its just poetic pretensions. Its first and most obvious attraction lay in the story of travel which it embodied. Few books were then so extensively and eagerly read as those which contained narratives of adventure ; and if such works were popular when written in unimaginative prose, how much more fascinating must they have seemed

when heightened for the first time by the fervour of verse? Next, the poem made revolt against canons of morality and religion, long held sacred among men; and at the time of its publication there was a growing appetite for such rebellion, and an increasing relish for turbulent emotion. Lastly, the poem was clearly informed throughout with the personality of the poet, whose individual character was ever present, and whose voice was heard in its pages—sometimes joyously, brightly, cheerily; sometimes sarcastically, brutally, insensately; sometimes pathetically, sadly, wearily, despairingly. Lord Byron told the world in the opening stanzas of this work, which bore every sign of being autobiographical, that in pique or despair at finding himself rejected by a young lady on whose love he had set his hopes, he had filled his country-house with abandoned women, and spent some time with them in every kind of voluptuous excess. Other poets had conceived such states of feeling and had projected them dramatically into scenes wherein they themselves played no part; but Byron's personality was hidden behind no veil of the dramatic creator; his genius fell far short of such objective exercise; and his thirst for notoriety inclined him always to purely subjective utterance. Then was there not ever moaning through all his song in every strain the sad burden of a soul sated of life and all the living? And when in his loneliest moods he poured forth his hymns to despair, his dirges over happiness, were not the thrilling accents felt by every reader not as sorrows mouthed to the multitude from the housetops, but as

secrets whispered to the ear in the confidence and solitude of friendship? What wonder that one who stormed so many hidden fortresses of delicious pride should find himself at twenty-four years of age lifted to a dazzling eminence of poetic supremacy with Wordsworth, Coleridge, and other incomparably truer poets, at his feet?

Byron had returned to England, and his actual personality had heightened the interest felt in his poetry. Men had never quite accepted the necessity that their laureate should live amid the mountains of Cumberland, clad in a duffle-cloak which concealed a coat almost as old-fashioned as the periwigs of their grandfathers. Their poet-hero had need to be a man like unto themselves; and Byron brought them more than all the splendour of a peer, and some of the courtliness of a Plantagenet. With a face where youth, beauty, birth, and genius strove together, where the auburn ringlets and arched eyebrows matched with the light, lustrous eyes, he was indeed a man to take captive in those days the love of lovely women and command the homage of honoured men. And Byron knew his power, and used it. He had laughed at morality, yet the *Monthly Review* fondled him; he had slandered the Tories, yet the *Quarterly* continued to cherish admiration for him; he had nourished a private resentment against Jeffrey, yet the *Edinburgh* accepted with scarcely a word the immeasurable fury of his castigation, and retorted only with the magnificent hope that it was in his power to build up a work which should 'endure (with

the *Lears*, *Macbeths*, and *Othellos*) among the most august fabrics of the genius of England.' Lastly, he had reviled religion, yet the puritan *Blackwood* said his work had exhibited 'our fallen nature in near approximation to the glories of its ultimate destiny.' Everything was, indeed, to be forgiven to the idol of the hour. Encouraged by such delusive worship, he prosecuted his self-made species of moral anatomy : he probed his nature for further depths of misanthropy, further dregs of licentiousness.

It is not too much to say that the character of Lord Byron, though untainted by the baser vices attributed to it during the poet's lifetime, consisted of a mass of miserable weaknesses and transparent affectations, relieved by certain amiable traits and some generous impulses. That one of these affectations was the affectation of athletics is not so much a matter for surprise or subject for contempt in Byron's case as in the case of those men of letters who (without that physical infirmity which perpetually reminded him of one great disadvantage at which he stood towards other men, and without that personal pride which goaded him into a futile assertion of thews and sinews he did not possess) are yet constantly following him in a silly pretension to athletic pleasures which are as foreign to their natural functions as they were impossible to Byron's powers. But that the personal disfigurement which only a miserable drunken woman at the Old Bailey could mimic, or Byron's coarser assailants in the press could sneer at, should of itself give rise, however indirectly,

to an affectation of abstemiousness, is a good deal less explicable and a good deal more odious.

Campbell, who did not usually spare Byron in any particular, was especially abusive of his affectation and pretence as to food. He used to say that the first time he dined with the poet was at Rogers's, where Byron would condescend to eat nothing but vegetables and drink nothing but water. Campbell attributed this behaviour merely to a silly desire on Byron's part to be talked about. After the party broke up he happened to go into the Thatched House Tavern, and whom should he see there but my lord, eating a hearty supper of solid meat and drinking a bottle of claret. 'I was disgusted,' said Campbell, 'by his affectation, and took care to speak to him, in order that he might see that I knew what an impostor he was.' This story may be a true one, and yet it hardly follows that Byron must perforce have been in this particular the impostor that Campbell thought him. It is but too well known that there constantly co-exists with an honest effort after abstemiousness a perpetual and incurable craving. This can often be conquered in society, though in solitude it asserts its sway; and there is nothing in the Campbell story which forbids the assumption that after a period in which Byron had succeeded in crucifying the craving of his too abundant flesh, the reaction had at length found vent without affectation and without pretence, in the manner described. It is hardly too much to say that even Byron's quarrel with his wife was due to the irritability incident to the fatness which he so loathed and

of which he tried to get rid. He himself told Medwin that the causes of his separation were too simple (meaning too commonplace) to admit of detailed description; and Mr. Jeaffreson's book rather lends itself to the somewhat ludicrous theory that even so 'simple' a cause as Byron's unreasonable anger at the dinner-table upon perceiving that Lady Byron could relish and be nourished by the food which he dare not touch was by no means an unimportant agent in generating that quarrel, which was afterwards erroneously and maliciously attributed to every mysterious or unexplained enormity, from murder to incest. Mr. Jeaffreson appears to think that in Byron's ridiculous (because wholly inordinate) efforts to reduce his corpulence he was sufficiently justified. After showing that Byron's lameness was in large part accountable for the fatness which he loathed, which he tried by every unnatural artifice to reduce, and which in the last resort may be said to have had its influence upon more than one disaster of the poet's life, Mr. Jeaffreson argues that when a man cannot be natural without looking like a hog, he does well to be unnatural for the sake of looking like a man. But, in truth, Byron's efforts to get rid of his corpulence were due much more to a desire to look unlike, rather than to look like, other men; and it is neither an unjust nor an ungenerous criticism to say that (his affectations being regulated by his vanities) he would hardly have been unwilling to 'look' like a sow in gestation if in such guise he had found it the easier to make women 'throw up their heads' at

him, or 'suffocate' him with the adulation which was one of his ambitions in life. To the young Marquis of Sligo, after his recovery from the fever that prostrated him at Patras, he remarked, on regarding himself in a mirror, 'How pale I look! I should like, I think, to die of a consumption, because then the women would all say, "See that poor Byron—how interesting he looks in dying!"' Moore was not wrong in attributing importance to this simple incident.

Byron had the affectation of unworldliness. Mr. Jeaffreson goes to great labour in order to show that the poet was incapable alike of the weakness of cultivating the friendship of great people, and of the miserable meanness of surrounding himself with men beneath him in rank for no better reason than that they rendered deference to his social superiority and fed him with flattery. True it is that some of Byron's intimate friends were not only of plebeian origin, but were notably, and sometimes for him inconveniently, poor in purse. Mr. Jeaffreson says a good deal about Byron's friendship for Eddleston, for the farmer's boy at Newstead, and for the youth in Athens to whom he made a handsome gift of money; and here the biographer is no doubt on ground that is safe and reliable. Less trustworthy, however, or at least more open to question, is what is said in reply to the accusation current in Byron's time that the poet was not without mercenary motives in his choice of a wife. Mr. Jeaffreson shows with much plausibility how remote were the expectations of Miss Milbanke when

Byron first proposed to her. But, in truth, the question is not one of how distant were in fact the lady's chances of becoming a rich woman, but of how near her suitor thought them ; and on this point we have the evidence of the poet's published letters and journal. Writing to Moore, September 1814, Byron says :

'I am going to be married. . . . She is said to be an heiress. but of that I really know nothing certainly, and shall not inquire.'

Again, in October 1814, averring that he had chosen from love, not money :

'I certainly did not address Miss Milbanke with these views, but it is likely she will prove a considerable *parti*. All her father can give or leave her he will ; and from her childless uncle, Lord Wentworth, whose barony it is supposed will descend to Lady Milbanke (his sister), she has expectations.'

After the marriage (March, 1815) he writes :

'Lord W. is now in town, and in very indifferent health. You perhaps know that his property, amounting to £7,000 or £8,000 a year, will eventually devolve upon Bell.'

It ought in fairness to be said that the letters which contain these mercenary calculations contain also a good deal that bears witness to an unselfish passion. But Byron's pecuniary embarrassments were at this juncture falling thick upon him ; and there is nothing in the passages quoted to forbid the assumption that the man who for several years affected indifference to the earnings of his pen, and afterwards bartered for its products with a penuriousness that was hardly less than contemptible, was first drawn into his engagement with Miss Milbanke by sincere affection,

and that he then pursued it in the hope of thereby retrieving his fallen fortunes. There was nothing necessarily ignoble in thus fostering expectations of worldly advantage which co-existed with, and did not take the place of, unselfish love. The only meanness with which Byron is properly chargeable in this connection is the affectation of superiority to all considerations of gain.

Growing out of his affectation of unworldliness was his affectation of generosity. It is true enough that from time to time Byron made to friends and dependents large gifts of money. But this form of cheap generosity is one of the most conspicuous phenomena of natures tainted by the worst kind of personal selfishness. To part with money when it is not an immediate necessity, and when the loss of it touches no single luxury that comes home to a man's personal comfort, is a thing that few persons could not compass without a pang who are not tarnished by the mere love of possession or greed of gold. To permit the impulses of generosity to entrench upon actual well-being is of course a much higher thing, and of this Byron was from first to last incapable. There is nothing in Mr. Jeaffreson's book more true, there was nothing in Moore's slavering 'Life' less false, than that Byron's nature was grounded in morbid selfishness. When he projected the ill-fated *Liberal* and saw the necessity for a coadjutor, he made his first proposals to Moore; and, failing with him, he then had recourse to Hunt. The overtures were entirely on Byron's side; the scheme was his; and the only real ad-

vantages anticipated were such as concerned Byron more nearly than any other. Yet when the sorry business came to an end, and Byron was so far from reaping the benefits which he expected to accrue that he was involved in a serious loss of money, he was capable of the meanness, not to speak of the deliberate and shameful untruthfulness, of saying that the brothers Hunt had pressed him to engage in the work, that in an evil hour he had consented, that he had sacrificed himself to others, and that he had engaged in the journal from goodwill towards the editor of the *Examiner*, and in the hope that the unfortunate cockney might, by the aid of his literary contributions, render himself independent.

The only affectation which Byron in truth did not possess was the affectation of licentiousness. When he told the world from beginning to end of his career that he was a man who had indulged every natural form of sensual excess, he was speaking with absolute sincerity and reliable truthfulness. Mr. Jeaffreson makes effort to show that the naughty behaviour very clearly indicated in 'Childe Harold,' existed mainly in the poet's inner consciousness. Not to be unnecessarily severe on a great man long dead, one would express astonishment that a view of Byron's behaviour like this can be taken by one so competent to form a just opinion respecting it. Is it not the fact that in 1808, after involving himself at Cambridge in debts to the extent of £10,000, Byron spent his money in the ordinary pleasures supposed to be appropriate to a young gentleman of quality; that he lived with a saucy

fille de joie at Brompton—a girl who used to ride about with him dressed as a boy, who visited Brighton with him, and even spent a time at Newstead? Are we forbidden by the facts to believe that the Paphian girls, so naughtily alluded to, were neither creatures of the poet's fancy, nor yet (what Mr. Jeaffreson describes them) the sober servitors who cooked the poet's dinner and made his bed? Is it not the fact that, after dismissing (on the suspicion of some moral 'levity') one of the said Paphian girls who had been supposed to stand rather too high in her master's favour, Byron wrote to Hodgson, 'I have one request to make, which is, never mention a woman again in any letter to me, or even allude to the existence of the sex'?

It was not until the first two cantos of 'Childe Harold' had been written and printed, and the advance sheets had been circulated in the drawing-rooms of London with the many mysterious heraldings of the knowing ones, that the social rage which formed an integral part of Byron's reputation while he lived made itself manifest. One of the earliest consequences of that personal celebrity was the *liaison* with Lady Caroline Lamb—the Mrs. Felix Lorraine of 'Vivian Grey,' the Lady Monteagle of 'Venetia.' Lady Caroline was then one of the queens of society. Beautiful, with the beauty that we have grown to associate with the idea of a fashionable English lady of the eighteenth rather than of the nineteenth century, in character she was akin to the pert combinations of silliness and sin which Fielding depicts with only too startling

fidelity. She was not a Lady Bellaston, yet she had some of that woman's characteristics. She was a giddy, light-hearted creature, devoid of moral fibre, though not incapable of a species of affection where her pride, as well as her passions, was consulted. It would be unjust to say that she was in any extreme sense a wicked and designing woman. She was merely a vain creature, with dark eyes and fawn-flaxen hair, with a voice soft, low, and caressing, with a piquant lisp that added a charm to her beauty, and with a fascination of simpleness that was peculiarly hers. She cared little for womanly virtues, for she had never been taught that there was anything in the world better worth attending to than personal attractiveness.

To such a woman it was no crime to be unfaithful in heart, if not in act, to a loyal husband. Why should she alone of all the gay creatures of fashion be denied the social excitements of love intrigues? She was, in truth, descended from half a hundred noble houses. She was married to one of the finest-natured gentlemen of his time. She had children to think for, and the dignity and honour of a woman to preserve; but what were these things to such an absurd but delightful creature compared with the delirium of having half the men of genius at her feet? As Mr. Jeaffreson says, her *rôle* in the wild world of which she was a queen was that of the saucy, freakish, impulsive, gushing eccentric. At her wedding she fell into a fit of fury about nothing, stormed at the officiating bishop, tore her dress to pieces, and was

carried to her carriage nearly unconscious. One day at a ball she met Harness, then a demure young Cantab reading for orders. In a lull in the dance she said to him, 'Gueth how many pairth of thilk thtockingth I have on.' The rather serious young student could not answer the nice question and blushed, whereupon she (raising her skirts above a pretty ankle and pointing to a tiny foot) said 'shicth.' Such a woman as this, with Rogers and Moore already among her lovers, was hardly likely to let Byron go by without making demand of his homage. 'I must see him,' she said to Rogers. 'He has a club-foot, and bites his nails,' answered the cynical bachelor-banker. 'If he is as ugly as Æsop, I must know him,' she replied. She met him first at a ball, where the women were 'suffocating' him with adulation. She walked steadily up to him without speaking a word, looked earnestly at him, and turned on her heel. Then she went home and made this note on the new poet: 'Mad—bad—and dangerous to know.' It was like her capricious character. But she had not the least intention of renouncing her purpose to know him, after all. She knew, with the instinct of a coquette, that this was the best way to pique him into loving her. A day or two later they met again; the next day following Byron called upon her, and for nearly a year he was almost a daily visitor at her house. There are, of course, two ways in which a man possessed of any kind of fascination may encounter a woman like this. The first is the way of a strong man, not necessarily superior to the

blandishments of a beautiful woman's idolatry, but incapable of wanton intrigue, and at once too robust and too self-possessed to be drawn into a connection injurious to her honour, or to do less than protect her in her vanity and her silliness from the confusion with which she would overwhelm herself. The second way is the more familiar one of the practised seducer who accepts every exhibition of womanly weakness as another apology for his transgression. It is to be feared that Byron's way of dealing with Lady Caroline Lamb partook rather of the latter than of the former character. Of course, Lady Caroline, like all the world, knew something of the loose way in which he had amused himself at Newstead ; and if she was not scandalized by his domestic morals in his dealings with Paphian girls, she was hardly likely to expect a very rigorous morality in his intercourse with herself. She was over head and ears in love with him, and seized every occasion for letting the world know everything about the matter. In her first letter to him she offered him all her jewels if he was in want of money. Whenever he entered a room where she was, she pounced down upon him as her peculiar possession. Occasionally upon leaving a party to which she had not been invited he found her waiting for him in the street. Sometimes they quarrelled, and then she would go at midnight to Rogers's for the purpose of entreating him to make up her difference with Byron. The Byromania was then at its height, and at first little was said of all this. But presently Lady Melbourne

ventured to entreat her daughter-in-law to be more careful; and her own mother, Lady Bessborough, begged her to go for a change to Ireland. Of course the advice was regarded as insulting. The lady hastened to Byron to tell him all the barbarities done her, and to implore him to fly with her. But the poet had by this time begun to tire of the fascinating lady, and he repelled her flattering invitation with what the lady considered coolness and sternness. He told her, however, that he would with pleasure give up all here or beyond the grave for her; he did not care who knew this, or what use was made of it; he had been, he was, hers, freely and entirely, to obey, to honour, love, and fly with her, when, where, and how herself might determine. It is hardly worth while to pursue this matter further. Enough that, like all similar *liaisons*, it ran through the several stages beginning with love and ending with hate, until the connection closed with the memorable and barbarous letter printed in the novel which the lady wrote to prove that Byron was of a Satanic character. In 'Glenarvon' the letter runs:

'I am no longer your lover; and since you oblige me to confess it by this truly unfeminine persecution, learn that I am attached to another, whose name it would, of course, be dishonest to mention. I shall ever remember with gratitude the many instances I have received of the predilection you have shown in my favour. I shall ever continue your friend, if your ladyship will permit me so to style myself. And as a first proof of my regard, I offer you this advice: correct your vanity, which is ridiculous; exert your absurd caprices on others; and leave me in peace.'

The other lady to whom Byron here declares himself attached was no doubt the Miss Milbanke who

became his wife. This lady was in all respects, save beauty, the reverse of her rival. Though an admirer of Byron's genius, she was by no means a Byromaniac, and the poet appears to have had for her a spiritual affection that can hardly have been exercised in Lady Caroline's case. It is needless to traverse afresh the threadbare story of Byron's quarrel with his wife. Seventeen years hence the Hobhouse MS. will be published which is expected to prove that Byron had failings—many failings—but was untainted by the baser vices. Mr. Jeaffreson says that Lady Byron is to be compassionated—like all persons who have come through circumstances rather than by voluntary intrusion to high places for which they are singularly incompetent. This is, we take it, because Lady Byron could not humour a man who did not deserve to be humoured. In withdrawing as speedily as possible from a distasteful union she certainly consulted her own happiness primarily. But under what possible obligation did she rest to consult Byron's? Are we to hear again and again the old and hackneyed story that a man of genius is entitled to more consideration in domestic life than ordinary folks can claim; that, having more whims and more acerbity of temper than afflict other people, he is to be more borne with? The man who could be guilty of the foppish egotism and melodramatic falseness of permitting the 'Fare thee well' to be printed in the corner of a newspaper before it met the eye of the person to whom it was addressed, was certainly not entitled to much forbearance. But that Byron com-

mitted at such a juncture the outrage for bidding for popular sympathy was then the least of his offences against decency and right feeling. He was at this time one of the directors of Drury Lane Theatre, and one day he received in this capacity a visit from a step-daughter of William Godwin's, anxious to go on the stage. Jane Clermont was pretty as well as clever, and that her application did not meet with success is probably to be accounted for on the ground that at such a moment when his wife had newly left him, Byron thought she would be less serviceable as an actress than as his mistress. In due course she became the mother of his child; and when, in 1816, sympathetic ladies were reading the Farewell with tears, Byron was consoling himself in his 'Claire's' smiles. Of course this connection speedily terminated. It was the peculiarity of Byron's numerous love affairs that no woman ever loved him ardently who did not in the end hate and loathe him. Towards the close of the year in which this occurred he made the acquaintance in Venice of a linendraper's wife, Marianna Legati, who became his mistress. Not yet, however, was his appetite for licentiousness satiated. Of his excesses in the Palazzo Mocenigo in Venice we all know enough. There he received the lowest and most vicious class of Venetian women, and transformed the palace of an English nobleman into a very lazaret-house of infamy. It is needless to traverse the story of his connection with the Countess Guiccioli — perhaps the least discreditable, only because the most enduring, of his intrigues. So much

for his personal character. Of his literary character it was well said that he adorned himself in the person of a merciless corsair on a rock in the Mediterranean, with every alluring quality—except common decency and common honesty. But he over-reached himself. What wonder that men should at length take him for the listless and sated libertine he persistently said he was ! The principal canon of Byron's morality appeared to have become : 'Hate your neighbour : love your neighbour's wife.' The world, which had stood a good deal, could hardly stand that. Henceforth it must begin another of the septennial periods of moral rectitude which Macaulay describes. When at length Byron's wife was separated from him, and popular sympathy (weary of his ardent and vivid delineations of a morbid personality) began to feel the promptings of a puritanical reaction, a howl of indignation against his excesses drove him again from England. Southey now christened Byron 'the Coryphæus of the Satanic School.' *Blackwood* was among the first to raise the voice in the name of virtue. In a review of 'Don Juan' (1819) it says :

'Those who are acquainted (as who is not?) with the main incidents in the private life of Lord Byron . . . will scarcely believe that the odious malignity of this man's bosom should have carried him so far as to make him commence a filthy and impious poem with an elaborate satire on the character and manner of his wife—from whom, even by his own confession, he has been separated only in consequence of his own cruel and heartless misconduct. It is vain for Lord Byron to attempt in any way to justify his own behaviour in that affair ; and now that he has so openly and audaciously invited inquiry and reproach, we do not see any good reason why he should not be

plainly told so by the general voice of his countrymen. It would not be an easy matter to persuade any Man who has any knowledge of the nature of Woman, that a female such as Lord Byron has himself described his wife to be, would rashly, or hastily, or lightly separate herself from the love (with) which she had once been inspired for such a man as he is, or was. Had he not heaped insult upon insult and scorn upon scorn—had he not forced the iron of his contempt into her very soul—there is no woman of delicacy and virtue, as he *admitted* Lady Byron to be, who would not have hoped all things, and suffered all things from one, her love of whom must have been inwoven with so many exalting elements of delicious pride, and more delicious humility. To offend the love of such a woman was wrong—but it might be forgiven; to desert her was unmanly—but he might have returned and wiped for ever from her eyes the tears of her desertion; but to injure and desert, and then to turn back and wound her widowed privacy with unhallowed strains of cold-blooded mockery—was brutally, fiendishly, inexpiable mean. For impurities there might be some possibility of pardon, were they supposed to spring only from the reckless buoyancy of young blood and fiery passions—for impiety there might at least be pity, were it visible that the misery of the impious soul were as great as its darkness; but for offences such as this . . . which speak the wilful and determined spite of an unrepenting, unsoftened, smiling, sarcastic, joyous sinner—for such diabolical, such slavish vice there can be neither pity nor pardon.'

It is clear, as Macaulay said, that those vices which destroy domestic happiness should be as much as possible repressed; and equally clear that they cannot be repressed by penal legislation. It is therefore right and desirable that public opinion should be directed against them. What, then, the extent was of Byron's culpability we may never know (unless, as seems improbable, Lord Broughton's papers seventeen years hence may tell us); whether his private life was merely bad, or very bad, we have at present no means of judging. Perhaps it is true that he was no

more to blame than most men who were not on good terms with their wives; perhaps his offence was a secret sin. Byron was a man of inexhaustible passion, limitless capacity for enjoyment, measureless sensibility to pain; and it was an error to judge of him by the standards proper to the everyday Browns, Joneses, or Robinsons. We are now only concerned to remember that he betook himself to the Adriatic, carrying there a heart made callous by many blows. With nothing to fear from the morality of the land of his adoption, he plunged, as we have seen, into yet more abject vices, and finally drooped under the weight of six-and-thirty years. His hold of the English public had for years been slipping away. Had his poetry no immutable grasp? He had reared his fabric on the illusive sands of his own picturesque personality; only the old-time passions could endure. He had added little or nothing to men's knowledge of the human heart. Very soon it came to be seen that Love, Sorrow and Death, the immortal triumvirate of all noble poetry, found after all only a foster-mother in his muse. He had addressed himself to the sentient faculties; it was observed, not unjustly, that he had familiarized the vocabulary, not of affection, but lust; and now, grey with few years, broken with many excesses, he must yield up his arbitrary sway. Goethe loved him as a poet; Shelley loved him as a man, but his day was done. He had failed, miserably failed, in an endeavour to found a political party, and his last prayer was to die sword in hand

for the Greek people, then bowed under a cruel yoke. England cared no longer for her prodigal. He was a flower whose bloom had gone. But when in 1824 the news came to her from Italy that the young, brilliant, unhappy nobleman she had banished for ever had died at Missolonghi, amidst strangers and aliens, her remorse knew no measure.

It will be remembered that the *Edinburgh* counselled Byron at the beginning of his career to abandon poetry; mark now with what accents of unappeasable regret the same review mourns his death. Surely there is ample stimulus in these contrasted utterances for any genuine son of genius who is faint with the wounds of mingled misapprehension and neglect.

‘Mr. Shelley died, it seems, with a volume of Mr. Keats’s poetry grasped with one hand in his bosom! These are two out of four poets, patriots and friends, who have visited Italy within a few years, both of whom have been hurried to a more distant shore . . . To this band of immortals a third has since been added!—a mightier genius, a haughtier spirit, whose stubborn impatience and Achilles-like pride only death could quell. Greece, Italy, the world, have lost their poet-hero; and his death has spread a wider gloom, and been recorded with a deeper awe than has waited on the obsequies of any of the many great who have died within our remembrance. Even detraction has been silent at his tomb; and the more generous of his enemies have fallen into the rank of his mourners. But he set like the sun in his glory, and his orb was greatest and brightest at the last; for his memory is now consecrated no less by freedom than genius . . . He probably fell a martyr to his zeal against tyrants. He attached himself to the cause of Greece, and, dying, clung to it with a convulsive grasp, and has thus gained a niche in her history.’*

In this chapter the aim has been to set in inter-

* *Edinburgh Review*: Shelley’s ‘Posthumous Poems,’ 1824.

esting contrast the earlier (adverse) and later (laudatory) reviews of Byron. But earlier and later criticisms are not more unlike in spirit than the works criticized are unlike in merit. One cannot but be struck by the spontaneity and the excellence of the praise bestowed upon this poet throughout the best years of his life. We can meet with no such admirable criticism of poetry in the pages of the *Edinburgh, Quarterly, Blackwood, and New Monthly* as Byron's work called forth from time to time. To what may this excellence in Byron's case (contrasted with the commonplace that characterized the reviews of other poets appearing in the same places) be attributed? Was it that Byron stood, as Macaulay said, between the old school and the new, and was the interpreter of both to the multitude? Surely not. The secret of this poet's success is not far to seek. Byron was the creature of his age: he accepted the dogmas of the poetic sect that found favour in his time, and he caused them to pass through a personality which was fascinating in its sorrows and even in its sins. This is not to dig deeply for the constituents of Byron's success, but coupled with a genius that compassed the whole domain of passion, these facts are perhaps sufficient to account for the pre-eminence of the poet in his own day.

‘THE COCKNEY SCHOOL.’



LEIGH HUNT.

IT will be remembered that Southey attempted, late in life, to repudiate the allegation that he had ever been concerned with Wordsworth in the formation of a new school of poetry; and that Coleridge said the only thing he claimed to possess in common with either of these poets was good sense, confirmed by long study of the best models of Greece, Italy, and England. It is nevertheless not too much to say that all three were influenced by exactly the same forces of rational conviction, and that, notwithstanding their personal opposition to such classification, they may properly be named together as leaders of a single poetic school. Urged doubtless by kindred motives to those which operated in the cases of Southey and Coleridge in their attitude towards Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley endeavoured to repudiate the charge of having been concerned with Leigh Hunt in the formation of a school of poetry. It will be easy to show that in the latter case, unlike the former one, there was ample justification for such repudiation, and that, therefore,

it is to some extent injudicious and injurious to class together these three poets under the name by which they were known to the great body of their contemporaries. Accident, not special poetic affinity, brought them together; and they never had much more in common than is usually the case between any three poets who are the creatures of any single age. Certainly their several theories of poetry were dissimilar, if not in absolute antagonism; and there cannot be shown to exist in 'Rimini,' 'Endymion,' and 'The Revolt of Islam' any such kinship of purpose and contrast of means as gave unity of aim to the associated pieces in the first 'Lyrical Ballads.' Indeed, so much were these men at variance as to the true mission of poetry, that Keats went the rather audacious length of advising Shelley to put aside a little of his exuberant magnanimity, and trouble himself more to load every rift of his work with ore; and Shelley's last warm tribute to the genius of his friend did not go forth without a side-reference to the author's known repugnance to the principles of art on which Keats's best work had been constructed. With so many and such emphatic points of difference, it may be asked with proper surprise how, at any time, the three poets came to be classed together; and the answer is one that must be sought for where poetry plays no part. The story that requires to be told is short, and is full of interest and suggestion.

In 1816, Leigh Hunt was editor of the *Examiner*, then a sixteen-page Sunday paper, devoted chiefly to politics and plays. Towards the close of that year

the journal developed a literary character, and began to review poetry with peculiar animation. One of the last issues of 1816 contained an article entitled 'Three Young Poets,' treating of inedited poetry by three unknown writers—Cornelius Webb, Percy B. Shelley, and John Keats. Internal evidence pointed to the editor as author; and certainly the little paper was characterized by the confidential personal tone out of which Leigh Hunt's enemies made so much. Subsequent issues of the *Examiner* contained sonnets and lyrical pieces by all three authors dealt with in the article in question; and so the inference remained an obvious one that a little coterie had been formed, of which the office in London of the Sunday journal formed the rallying-point.

A few months later (April, 1817), *Blackwood's Magazine* was founded in Edinburgh. The new periodical venture was established primarily to break the supremacy of the *Edinburgh Review* in politics; but this was not mooted in the prospectus that preceded it. One of the new features of the magazine was announced to be 'Notices of the most celebrated publications, and the contents of minor journals.'

Blackwood's first issues contained little or no political matter; but it was not the less easy on that account to see that party bias lay at the root of all its criticisms of men and books. Sweltering as it was under the full rigour of united northern Toryism and northern Puritanism, the *Examiner* speedily fell in its way; and the number of *Blackwood* (October, 1817) which contained the justly celebrated *jeu*

d'esprit entitled 'Chaldee Manuscript' (an allegorical account, in Scriptural language, of the quarrels of the founders of the magazine), contained also the first of a series of audacious attacks on the little band of London poets, of whom Leigh Hunt was at the time the only notable public figure. No two articles could be more dissimilar in spirit than the two in question. The one has been said to be worthy of a permanent place in literature by reason of its felicitous humour ; the other has, not unjustly, been stigmatized as one of the most cowardly and malignant assaults that ever disgraced the annals of literature.

The first article of the series began playfully enough :

'While the whole critical world is occupied with balancing the merits, whether in theory or in execution, of what is commonly called the Lake School, it is strange that no one seems to think it necessary to say a single word about another new school of poetry which has of late sprung up amongst us. The school has not, I believe, received any name ; but if I may be permitted to have the honour of christening it, it may henceforth be referred to by the designation of the Cockney School. Its chief doctor and professor is Mr. Leigh Hunt, a man certainly of some talent, of extraordinary pretensions both in wit, poetry, and politics, and withal of exquisitely bad taste, and extremely vulgar modes of thinking, and manners in all respects.'

One of the characteristics of these childish persons was, according to *Blackwood*, the restless interest which they summoned the public to take in everything belonging to their own triviality. The critic says :

'If Mrs. Robinson's dog had a bad night's repose, it was duly announced to the world ; Mr. Merry's accident in paring his nails solicited a similar sympathy ; the falling off of Mrs. R.'s

patch at the last ball, or the stains on Mr. M.'s full-dress coat, from the dropping of a chandelier, came before the earth with praiseworthy promptitude.'

Keats's volume of poems had appeared, containing an address to Leigh Hunt, as well as the well-known sonnet, beginning,

'Great spirits now on earth are sojourning,'
and ending,

'Listen awhile, ye nations, and be dumb.'

On the latter line, *Blackwood* says :

'The nations are to listen and be dumb! And why, good Johnny Keats? because Leigh Hunt is editor of the *Examiner*, and Haydon has painted the "Judgment of Solomon," and you and Cornelius Webb, and a few more city sparks are pleased to look upon yourselves as so many future Shakspeares and Miltons?'

This may, so far, be harmless banter enough, calculated rather to make the victims laugh than cry, and capable of giving serious offence only to the thickest of skulls and the thinnest of skins. Not to blink the facts, it is quite true that the young poets did render themselves liable to much good-humoured chaff. There was a deal of effeminacy in their social relations; they presented each other with wreaths of bay, bouquets of roses, locks of hair, shells and sea-weed; and wrote laudatory verses each to each, anticipatory of the renown they were soon to win :

'We'll talk of . . . Keats
The muse's son of promise, and what feats
He yet may do.'

Naturally, such behaviour called down the wrath of robust Scotch masculinity. *Blackwood* said :

'None of them are men of genius—none of them are men of

solitary habits . . . Why then do they perpetually chatter about themselves? Why is it they seem to think the world has no right to hear one [single word about any other persons than Hunt, the cockney Homer; Hazlitt, the cockney Aristotle; and Haydon, the cockney Raphael. These are all very eminent men in their own eyes. . . . Mr. Hazlitt cannot look round him at the Surrey, without resting his smart eye on the idiot admiring grin of several dozens of aspiring apprentices and critical clerks. Mr. Hunt cannot be *at home* at Hampstead, without having his Johnny Keatses and his Corny Webbs to cram sonnets into his waistcoat-pockets, and crown his majestic brows with

‘The wreath that DANTE wore!!!’

Good-humoured raillery was not prominent among the accomplishments of the Edinburgh writer who made it his business to ‘wither and blast’ the young London poets; so playful chaff had speedily to make way for scalding invective:

‘It is quite ridiculous to see how the vanity of these Cockneys makes them over-rate their own importance, even in the eyes of us that have always expressed such plain unvarnished contempt for them, and who do feel for them all a contempt too calm and profound to admit of any admixture of anything like anger or personal spleen. We should just as soon think of being wroth with vermin, independently of their coming into our apartment, as we should about having any feelings at all about any of these people, other than what are excited by seeing them in the shape of authors.’

And again, four years later:

‘There is but one word—of many melancholy and miserable meanings—and which we should not dare to apply to any of our brethren; but it may be applied, not only innocently but right-fully, to a Cockney; that one word is—*Fool!*’

After saying that between thirty or forty years ago the *Della Crusca* school was in great force, pouring out monthly, weekly and daily the whole

fulness of its sorrows in verse, revelling in moonlight, sighing with evening gales, lamenting over plucked roses, and bidding melodious farewells to the last butterfly of the season ; after announcing the death and burial of the obscure morning paper in which this ' reign of sympathy ' was first promulgated, and in which milliner's maids and city apprentices pined over the mutual melancholies of *Arley* and *Matilda*, *Blackwood* pathetically remarks that in this world folly is immortal, and that no sooner has one mass of tuneful nonsense been swept away than another succeeds to its glories and its fate.

'The *Della Crusca* School [has visited us again. . . . Its verses now transpire at one time from the retreats of Cockney dalliance in the London suburbs ; sometimes they visit us by fragments from Venice, and sometimes invade us by wainloads from Pisa. In point of subject and execution there is but slight difference ; both schools are "smitten with nature and nature's love," run riot in the intrigues of anemones, daisies, and buttercups, and rave to the "rivulets *proud*, and the deep-*blushing* stars."'

The critic goes on to show that the defunct school had at least the merit of moral innocence ; they might talk nonsense without measure ; be simple down to the very lowest degree of silliness, and ' babble of green fields ' enough to make men sick of summer ; but they kept their private irregularities to themselves, and sought for no reprobate popularity by avowing a pestilent hatred of everything generous, true and honourable, by desperate personal licentiousness, and a fiend-like desire to insult every moral tie and Christian principle. It was reserved for the foolish and profligate Cockney School to raise the

banner of an insensate and black ambition 'whose only aim was to ruin society.' Of course, much capital was made from time to time of the known facts of Shelley's private life, and of the circumstance that the 'Revolt of Islam' had first appeared as 'Laon and Cythna'—a poem portraying the love of a brother and sister. In like manner much was made of the few questionable lines which found their way into the otherwise pure poetry of 'the amiable but infatuated bardling' known to the critics as 'Master Johnny Keats.' Now Keats's private life was on the whole so chaste, and his conception of the natural dignity of woman was so exalted, that the mere presence of the other sex in the drawing-room is stated to have either thrilled him with a spiritual rapture 'such as might be induced by a symphony of Mozart,' or tortured him with a sense (in which sensuality had no share) of the measure in which the real woman fell short of his ideal. It will be agreed that, however far this attitude of the sexes may have been removed from a rational and enduring relation, it was least of all liable to the charge of raising the banner of a profligate ambition 'whose only aim was to ruin society.' Yet the public were not merely informed that from some of Keats's verses addressed to various amiable females it appeared, 'notwithstanding all his gossamer work, that Johnny's affections' were not 'entirely confined to objects purely ethereal,' but that sheer *indecenty* of theme and treatment had been throughout the foul moral blot which had caused good men and virtuous women to turn from 'Endy-

mion,' 'Lamia,' 'Eve of St. Agnes,' and 'Hyperion' with loathing or contempt. Leigh Hunt fared yet worse than Shelley and Keats. He was styled 'the meanest, the filthiest, the most vulgar of Cockney poetasters;' 'the most worthless and affected versifier of the time;' one who had 'dared to write in the solitude of a cell—whose walls ought to have heard only the sighs of contrition and repentance—a lewd tale of incest, adultery and murder, in which the violation of Nature herself was wept over, palliated, justified, and held up to imitation, and the violators themselves worshipped as holy martyrs.' One cannot forbear remarking upon the marvellous skill displayed by these critics in scenting out indecency of whatever kind in quarters whence people of healthier organs would scarcely hope to extract it; or upon the yet more extraordinary puritanism with which they reproduced at full length the poetry which they said ought never to have been written. Surely, impartial judges would think the reviewers increased the mischief in the measure in which they helped to disseminate it, notwithstanding that they attempted to fence it with withering denunciations. It must be said that some Scotch critics enjoy the questionable distinction of having ferreted out more filthiness than any other men whatever, and most of us will be content and happy to leave them in full possession of the inglorious boast which one of the keenest of the brotherhood advanced in his own favour, namely, that he had 'torn off the gaudy veil, and transparent drapery, and exhibited the painted cheeks and

writhing limbs, and branded with a burning iron the false face and brazen brow of many a literary harlot.'

In a review (1822) of a romance by Hunt, *Blackwood*, once again in a playful vein, says :

'It is a gross impertinence in any Cockney to write about—love. Love, correctly speaking, is a tender affair between a lady and a gentleman ; whereas King Leigh and his subjects imagine it to be merely a congress between a male and a female. There is the mistake, and it is a very gross one. . . . We have no doubt that Leigh supposes he can *make love* ;—not he—any more than he can *write grammar*. No lady in this land could even comprehend what he wished to have, with his eternal sidling and sliding about, and perking up his mouth, and swaling with his coat-tails. The lady would suspect that he wished to throw her off her guard, and that he was watching an opportunity to pick her pocket. But Leigh forgets that ladies do not nowadays wear pockets. However, be that as it may, any Cockney who writes about love deserves to be kicked—that is the short and long of the matter, and there is no occasion to say a single word more on the subject.'

The Edinburgh critics believed that of all the manias of the mad age in which it was their misfortune to live, the most incurable, as well as the most common, seemed to be no other than the 'Metromanie.' Of course the poetry of the London School was then a shut book to their northern intellects, just as the poetry of the Lake School had, ten years earlier, been a volume to whose cipher they had possessed no key. A good idea of the notion they entertained of the general characteristics of the poetry of such men as Hunt, Shelley, and Keats, may be gathered from the following parody, which appeared in *Blackwood* as late as 1821. Any apology that may be considered necessary for quoting such doggerel must be grounded in the belief which obtains

credit in some quarters, that men as frequently put their deepest feeling into their nonsense as their philosophy :

LOVE SONG

BY A JUNIOR MEMBER OF THE COCKNEY SCHOOL.

' Oh ! lovely Polly Savage,
Oh ! charming Polly Savage,
Your eyes beat Day and Martin,
Your neck is like red cabbage.

' Oh ! once I loved another girl,
Her name it was Maria ;
But, Polly dear, my love for you,
Is forty-five times higher.

* * *

' Oh, then our little son shall be
As wanton as a spaniel,
Him that we mean to christen'd be
Jacques Timothy Nathaniel.

And if we have a little girl,
I'm sure you won't be sorry
To hear me call the little elf,
Euphemiar Helen Laurar.'

This rare effusion appeared in a journal to which Christopher North and our friend 'Z' (is the conjunction necessary ?) contributed ! That such sorry stuff could be put forth by a reputable magazine as a legitimate parody of anything written by Shelley, Keats or even Hunt in his flightiest mood is truly inexplicable. The parody is not, however, without a certain interest as a satire on an article published in the *Examiner* some time previously in which the editor endeavoured to enforce the propriety of calling children by fine-sounding names.

Putting aside the petty envy, which alone might have incited the Edinburgh censors to reprobate the work of their London rivals, there can, as we have said,

be little doubt that political animosity lay at the root of their antagonism. Indeed *Blackwood* says:

‘The Cockney School of Politics is so intimately connected with the Cockney School of Poetry that it is almost impossible to describe the one without using many expressions equally applicable to the other. They are twin establishments created about the same time, supported by the same dupes and enlightened by the same quacks.’

The *Examiner* was the extreme Liberal organ of its day; yet but little can be seen in its pages that would excite attention in these times from the vehemence of its utterance or the disloyalty of its purpose. The journal contains much that must have been in serious opposition to ministerial measures; and what it says is put forth in uncompromising language; but it is hard to find anything more extravagant than a passionate resistance of the policy which, in the person of a certain Rev. Mr. Wilson, preacher at St. John’s Chapel, Bedford Row, recommended the revival of implicit obedience and non-resistance ‘even towards a Nero.’ So much for Leigh Hunt’s political partisanship: that of his brother poets was even less emphatic. Shelley was at this time too much concerned with hatching in his unpractical brain entirely new universes, year after year, to care a rush what direction was taken by the political sympathies of the Prince Regent; and Keats (had *Blackwood* but known it!) was at first inclining towards Toryism, and was certainly refusing to join Hunt in his abuse of the Liverpool-Castlereagh administration.

On Leigh Hunt, as the head and front of the political offending of the London School, the whole

rigour of rancorous diatribe was brought to bear. A serious and honest impeachment of Hunt might easily be forged out of the material which the *Examiner* alone affords. It could be shown that he spared no man whose political convictions were opposed to his own, and that he was so far from confining his criticisms to the direct political utterances of those who differed from him that he availed himself, in his early years, of nearly every unlawful weapon of personal abuse to draw down upon his adversaries the full measure of ridicule and contempt. He charged Gifford with being a servile Court tool, whose championship in the *Quarterly* was paid for in advance out of the purse of the Government. Now, Gifford was a stern, hard-natured man, who gave way but rarely to the promptings of the more generous side of his nature; but he was a scholar, a patriot, and, so far as we can see, a gentleman: one who desired sincerely to make public the best that he knew and thought on politics and literature, and who blundered oftenest in argumentative deduction from his self-chosen code of laws. The worst of Hunt's accusations were not confined to the impeachment of Gifford. He called Southey 'a canting hypocrite,' 'an apostate,' and 'a shallow idiot.' He said, or permitted another to say, that Coleridge was the 'Wandering Jew of Letters,' and 'the dog in the manger of literature.' Nay, it was he who, at the very time when he sat with others at the feet of the 'Seer of Highgate,' and gathered there more scraps perhaps than he found in all the world beside, said

anonymously (or was responsible for its being said), that 'no man would give Mr. Coleridge a penny for his thoughts,' and that the author of such nonsense as 'Kubla Khan' had never in his life been caught in 'the fact of a single intelligible sentence.'

It would be a serious conviction indeed, and such as would shatter for ever all faith in Hunt's character, if it were proved that the many and signal benefits conferred upon him by Shelley had been taken without ungrudging and lifelong gratitude ; but it could be shown that he rarely manifested the same marked and even obtrusive eagerness to rebut grave charges when made wrongfully against his friend, as was evinced when the libels were directed against himself. The silence of friends has been well said to serve too frequently as the confirmation of enemies ; and the present writer has elsewhere confessed to some feeling of astonishment at the silence of Hunt when Keats was being assailed, and to some feeling of contempt for the explanation which came later, when in full view of the pain that silence inflicted and of the suspicion (on Keats's part) which it engendered.* Be this as it may,

* What I said on this point in the 'Recollections of Rossetti' (p. 177) called forth more than one protest. The following extract from the letter of an eminent poet explains very fully the grounds of objection to my so-called impeachment of Hunt : 'The cruel injustice you have—of course unwittingly—done to the memory of Leigh Hunt is no matter of opinion ; it is one of fact and evidence. So far from attempting no defence of Keats in 1820, he published, on the appearance of the "Lamia and other Poems" in that year, perhaps the most cordial, generous and enthusiastic tribute of affectionate and ardent praise that had ever been offered by a poet to a poet, in the shape of a review almost overflowing the limits of the magazine in which it appeared

the editor of the *Examiner*, who had so often run *a-muck* with others, should surely have been prepared for many thrusts and lunges, and ought to have borne the pains of them, when they came, with equal fortitude and composure. In justice to him, however, let it be said that no man was ever more mendaciously attacked or more dogged by the feet of malice in disguise. We all think he was an able man, and, as Byron said, we are sure he was a poor one ; and he bore the full brunt of hatred and assault which always falls to the share of him who, fenced by no other armour than united poverty and power, dares to hate all rank, and the contumely of all rank, and to ask no quarter from the votaries of toadyism and the slaves of trimming and time-serving.

(the *Indicator*). A more "loud and earnest defence of Keats" could not be imagined or desired. And if Keats ever forgot this, or ever expressed doubts of Hunt's loyal and devoted regard, it simply shows that Keats was himself a disloyal and thankless son of genius, as utterly unworthy as he was utterly incapable of grateful, and unselfish, and manly friendship.' My reply to this, and to such objections as this, is as follows. First, I have nowhere mentioned 1820 as the year in which Hunt attempted no defence of Keats. I have pointed distinctly to 1818, the year of the publication of 'Endymion' and of the *Quarterly* attack upon it. Next, the Advertisement to the 'Lamia' volume bears date June, 1820, the volume was probably published in July, 1820, and at the middle of September, 1820, Keats left England for Italy. Third, the *Indicator* article appeared in the numbers for August 2nd and 9th (being written by Hunt while Keats was residing with him at Kentish Town), and the laudatory *Edinburgh* article had appeared before it. Fourth, Keats's letter touching Hunt's neglect was written before he left England. Fifth, Hunt gave a shabby notice of 'Lamia' in his introduction to the last edition of 'The Story of Rimini.' I shall be rejoiced if the facts I state can be explained away.—T. H. C.

In 1819, *Blackwood* says :

‘The knowing quack doctor has always performed some of his most wonderful cures upon himself, and maintains that, after all, he could not hold out three months without his infallible cordial. Hunt gains the goodwill of his patients by the same sort of tricks. He is always writing about headaches, bile, tea, and suppers of boiled eggs and lettuces, and so persuading his male subscribers that he is “*one of us*.” To win the affections of his ladies, he repeats the usual cant about the absurdity of marriage, and the glorious freedom of concubinage ; and the dear creatures are in raptures to find their own “noble theories” supported by a clever gentleman who publishes sixteen pages about the House of Commons and the playhouses every Sunday—besides sweet little volumes of verses every now and then, stuck full of beautiful eulogiums upon adultery and incest.’

And again :

‘The poetry of Mr. Hunt is such as might be expected from the personal character and habits of its author. As a vulgar man is perpetually labouring to be genteel, in like manner the poetry of this man is always on the stretch to be grand. . . . He would fain be always tripping and waltzing, and is sorry that he cannot be allowed to walk about in the morning with yellow breeches and flesh-coloured silk stockings. He sticks an artificial rosebud into his button-hole in the midst of winter. He wears no neckcloth and cuts his hair in imitation of the prints of Petrarch.’

The following affords a fair view of the personal attitude of the Tory critics of *Blackwood* towards the Liberal editor of the *Examiner* :

‘Mr. Hunt cannot utter a dedication, or even a note, without betraying the Shibboleth of low birth and low habits. He is the ideal of a Cockney poet. He raves perpetually about “green fields,” “jaunty streams,” and “o’er-arching leafiness,” exactly as a Cheapside shopkeeper does about the beauties of his box on the Camberwell Road. Mr. Hunt is altogether unacquainted with the face of Nature in her magnificent scenes ; he has never seen any mountain higher than Hampstead Hill, nor reclined by any river more pastoral than the Serpentine. But he is

determined to be a poet eminently rural, and he rings the changes till one is sick of him, on the beauties of the different "high views" which he has taken of God and nature, in the course of some Sunday dinner-parties, at which he has assisted in the neighbourhood of London. . . . In the opinion of these competent judges (*i.e.* young attorneys and embryo-barristers about town), London is the world, and Hunt is a Homer. Mr. Hunt is not disqualified by his ignorance and vulgarity alone, for being the founder of a respectable sect in poetry. He labours under the burden of a sin more deadly than either of these. . . . His religion is a poor tame dilution of the blasphemies of the Encyclopædia—his patriotism a crude, vague, ineffectual and sour Jacobinism. . . . He pretends, indeed, to be an admirer of Spenser and Chaucer, but what he praises in them is never what is most deserving of praise—it is only that which he humbly conceives bears some resemblance to the more perfect productions of Mr. Leigh Hunt. . . . Mr. Hunt's ideas concerning the sublime, and concerning his own powers, bear a close resemblance to those of friend Bottom, the weaver, on the same subjects: "I will roar that it shall do any man's heart good to hear me;" "I will roar you an 'twere any nightingale."

The reference in this paragraph to the religion of Leigh Hunt provokes the remark that notwithstanding the declared unbelief of the poets of the London School, we can find nothing more heretical in the *Examiner* than a condemnation of the doctrines of reprobation and eternal punishment—doctrines which men in our day who claim to be Christians believe, with the *Examiner*, to be in opposition to 'the theories of the amiable author of Christianity, and such as can only show degraded and slavish fear of a *powerful* Being, not hope and trust in a *good* one.' Leigh Hunt's heresy might have been overlooked, but his poverty was, as we have hinted, an unpardonable offence. It was of course not to be forgiven that the

founder of the Cockney School could claim the friendship of Lord Byron. On this subject *Blackwood* said :

‘How must the haughty spirit of Lara and Harold condemn the subaltern sneaking of our modern tuft-hunter. The insult which he offered Lord Byron in the dedication of “*Rimini*”—in which he, a paltry Cockney newspaper scribbler, had the assurance to address one of the most nobly-born of English patricians, and one of the first geniuses whom the world ever produced, as “My dear Byron,” although it may have been forgotten and despised by the illustrious person whom it most nearly concerned—excited a feeling of utter loathing and disgust in the public mind.’

When concealment of the appalling circumstance was no longer possible, that ‘one of the most nobly born of English patricians’ had been so much impressed with the character and powers of the ‘paltry Cockney newspaper scribbler’ who had offered him the wanton insult of a dedication, that he had invited him to join Shelley, himself and others at their Italian retreat, with a view to the establishment of the *Liberal*, the irate *Blackwood* (1822) bade farewell to the ‘Cockney King’ in some mock verses, of which these are the first :

‘The kind Cockney Monarch, he bids us farewell,
Taking his place in the Leghorn-bound smack—
In the smack, in the smack—ah ! will he never come back ?
What will become of Webb, Hazlitt, and all the pack ?
I’m sure our Star’s gone, and we’re left in a plight.’

It was a trying blow to the northern censors, and perhaps it was scarcely a matter for surprise that they had need to solace themselves for such pre-ferment of the enemy, by taking a parting fling at the most ‘nobly-born patrician,’ himself :

‘It is, on the whole, however, satisfactory to see the Cockney in his proper situation—the menial of a lord. This is the man who, for years, kept abusing nobility; and now sneaks fawningly, with hat in hand, to “my dear Byron,” and is quite happy to do any little dirty job imposed on him by the aristocratical pride of the domineering lord. See him in the *Liberal*. Enter—Lord Byron with a frown and a stride; follows—Leigh Hunt with a utensil on a salver, etc., etc. That Satan should stoop to associate with an incubus, shows there is degeneracy in hell.’

We have kept to the last a part of the first and foulest of *Blackwood’s* long series of critiques on Hunt. It appears in the October number of 1817.

‘His (Leigh Hunt’s) poetry resembles that of a man who has kept company with kept-mistresses. His muse talks indelicately like a tea-sipping milliner girl.’

After an insinuation to the effect that perhaps Leigh Hunt is an unfortunate woman disguised in yellow breeches, the first edition contains the following paragraph, which was struck out of all subsequent editions :

‘Some excuse for him there might have been, had he been hurried away by imagination or passion. But with him Indecency is a Disease, and he speaks unclean things from perfect inanition. The very Concubine of so impure a wretch as Leigh Hunt would be to be pitied, but alas for the Wife of such a Husband! For him there is no charm in simple Seduction; and he gloats over it only when accompanied with Adultery and Incest.’

It was felt that the public would certainly require a key to understand this venomous assault, and to enable them to do so, a good-natured friend of Hunt’s wrote to them and him as follows :

‘I have to inform you that report speaks of you as a perfect tyrant in your family, and your wife as the most abject of your slaves, that you are so entirely devoted to the gratifications of

your passions, and so completely given up to sensuality, that no female of your acquaintance is secure from your addresses, for not any ties are considered by you as sacred, if they come in contact with your inclination ; and that a sister of Mrs. Hunt's resides with you, who is the mother of at least one child, of which you are the father.'

Leigh Hunt's reply was scarcely satisfying. He began by publishing in his own paper on two successive weeks, a note addressed to his critic, which ran :

'The writer of the article signed "Z" in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* for October, 1817, is invited to send his address to the printer of the *Examiner*, in order that justice may be executed on the proper person.'

Of course the 'writer of the article signed "Z"' was much too knowing a bird to be caught by such chaff. He declared his unwillingness to be brought into 'unnecessary collision with a lunatic;' so all that remained to Hunt was simply to rebut the charges of his anonymous slanderer. This he did in the following terms :

"Z."—This poor wretched, lying, and cowardly creature has now had more than ample time to come forward, and has not done so . . . but he or his employers must not think to escape while the same venomous malignity survives. . . . Reptile indeed he is, and most unhappy creature must be, to feel excited to pour forth misrepresentations which could not be falser if he had cried out in his anguish at the blackness of the green leaves, or the hatefulness of affection.'

Most of us have a kindness for Leigh Hunt. Everyone feels that few men have ever had their merits so grudgingly allowed. No one now believes the rancorous stories that were told with respect to him. Macaulay gave expression to the popular feeling with

regard to this author when he said : ' Unless we are greatly mistaken, he is a very clever, a very honest, and a very good-natured man.' His worst offences against morality may be found embodied in his ' Story of Rimini,' a poem in which he celebrates, with some show of sympathy, the love of a man for his sister-in-law. This may not involve a very terrible transgression in the eyes of men whose ears are attuned to the strains of the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill. But it was in direct antagonism to the code of honour recognised in Hunt's time ; and, after all, a man has himself to blame if he finds to his cost that the public are unable to separate the morality of the author from the morality of his works, after he has put it in their power to charge him with personal participation in any immorality—or supposed immorality—to which he has extended his countenance and sympathy.

A volume like the present is destitute of philosophical pretensions if it fails to afford a judicious explanation of the critical anomalies it unearths. The attacks made upon Hunt during his lifetime were due to causes less remote and more obvious than operated in the case of any of his contemporaries. Those causes were threefold : the first of them concerned the mere accidents of his literary position ; the second, his natural infirmities as a poet ; and the third, his affectations as a man. It was Leigh Hunt's misfortune that his life was cast in London, in days when Edinburgh was making effort to break the literary supremacy of the English metropolis. The

story of the origin of the *Edinburgh Review*, which comes to us from Sydney Smith, conveys an idea that political rebellion lay at the root of the scheme. 'The principles of the French Revolution were then fully afloat,' he says, 'and it is impossible to conceive a more violent and agitated state of society. Among the first persons with whom I became acquainted, [*i.e.* in Edinburgh, where from stress of politics and war he had put in on his way from a curacy on Salisbury Plain to the University of Weimar], were Lord Jeffrey, Lord Murray, and Lord Brougham; all of them maintaining opinions upon political subjects a little too liberal for the dynasty of Dundas, then exercising supreme power over the northern division of the island. One day we happened to meet in the eighth or ninth story or flat in Buccleugh Place, the elevated residence of the then Mr. Jeffrey. I proposed that we should set up a Review, and this was acceded to with acclamation. I was appointed Editor, and remained long enough in Edinburgh to edit the first number of the *Edinburgh Review*. The motto I proposed for the Review was:

' "Tenui musam meditamur avena."

' "We cultivate literature upon a little oatmeal."

But this was too near the truth to be admitted.' There can be little doubt that whatever the germinative idea of the Review in question, its governing idea was that of destroying the literary centralisation of London. It had, as we have shown, been going no more than fifteen years, when the *Edinburgh Magazine* was started with such objects of rivalry as have been

already explained. But the two Edinburgh periodicals were not so much at variance in political principle as at one in literary purpose.

The interval between 1802 and 1817 had been an important epoch in periodical literature in London. It had seen the commencement of the *Examiner*, the *Quarterly* and the *Literary Gazette*, not to speak of journals of less moment. London had not seriously suffered from the spurt made by Edinburgh. Another effort could be put forth to establish the credit of the northern metropolis ; and what time could be more suitable for a sortie than the present, when the silly affectation and detestable fidgetyness of a band of journalistic Cockneys were exciting the disgust of persons of healthy instincts ? So Edinburgh threw down the gauntlet, and perhaps London accepted the challenge. It is amusing to observe to what depths of meanness the rancour of the belligerents speedily descended. There was not even harmony within their own camps, and the only thing that prevented absolute mutiny was the sense of an outside force, against which, in some scarce explicable way, they had common cause. How ridiculous were these squabbles among the tribes of Noodledums will be seen from the following letter, written by one whose powers and position ought surely to have placed him above such pettiness of spirit : 'I passed three days with Walter Scott,' says Southey, 'an amusing and highly estimable man. You see the whole extent of his powers in the Minstrel's "Lay," of which your opinion seems to accord with mine—a very amusing poem.' The key to this

letter at once peeps out when we remember that Southey as a *Quarterly* man belongs to London, and Scott as an *Edinburgh* man, to Edinburgh. 'Scott bears a great part in the *Edinburgh Review*,' continues Southey, 'but does not review well.' Diversity of political opinion could not in this case wring the withers of the man who made such an obvious aberration from the straight line of truth; both men were Tories, and afterwards they were colleagues. It was merely London against Edinburgh or what stood for Edinburgh. Again, James Hogg said of Wordsworth, 'He seems a very intelligent man—for a horse-couper.' Diversity of social habit could hardly compel the uncouth shepherd to throw a word like this at his dog. It was merely Edinburgh against London, or what stood for London. Byron was not wrong when he said that the Scotch, Lake and Cockney troubadours and critics were spoilt by living in little circles and petty societies. Such rivalry without object was more than enough to ruin all the creative genius that came within its influence. To productive talent it was what Goethe says all such literary passions must needs be, a noxious mist, a dropping poison, which destroys the tree of creative power. The only men who were not utterly lost to it were those who kept aloof from it and isolated themselves by main force. They alone breathed the undisturbed, somnambulant atmosphere in which anything great could thrive.

It is true that for some score years at the beginning of the century, Edinburgh had its own distinct voice

in literature. It was not merely that a great organ of public opinion came to us from that city, but that the young men by whom it was written, and the opinions to which it gave expression, were distinctly and peculiarly Scotch. It does not concern us to inquire what the value was of the influence exercised; it is enough that it was a new influence, or at least an influence brought to bear in a new way and from a new place. But in what did this spurt result? It resulted in collapse—comparative if not absolute collapse. The very men who had set out with the avowed object of breaking the supremacy of London, were found one by one to bend the knee to her, and to fly off for London triumphs and London rewards as speedily as London evinced a disposition to receive them. Nor was this all. Upon the critical organs of the north crept gradually the influence of London and of the English and Irish provinces, and for a time Dr. Maginn became the voice of *Blackwood* and Hazlitt the voice of the *Edinburgh*. The rigid puritanism which had been the governing characteristic of Scotch criticism subsided, and then the conquest of the conquerors was complete. London dominated Edinburgh. The Magazines remained, but the *Edinburgh* was no more Scotch than the *Examiner*, or *Blackwood* than the *Quarterly*. Edinburgh had lost.

During the struggle, however, it was natural that Leigh Hunt, as editor of a notorious Liberal journal in London, and head of a circle of poets there, should be the mark at which many of the arrows of Edinburgh should be directed. And the arrows

were sometimes the arrows of truth, though too frequently barbed with malice. But if the accident of Hunt's literary position in London exposed him to many assaults of criticism, his natural infirmities as a writer exposed him to many more. Perhaps there are few, if any, faults of which Hunt as a critic was not guilty. It is unwise to claim for him the honour of initiating that new school of criticism which in our day has substituted for judgment by fixed law and set rule, interpretative insight and appreciativeness. But he is much underrated as a poet. Mr. Browning's admiration of Hunt is well known. 'I have always venerated you as a poet,' he writes to the subject of his panegyric; 'I believe your poetry to be sure of its eventual reward; other people, not unlikely, may feel like me, that there has been no need of getting into feverish haste to cry out on what is.' It is hard to echo such terms of praise. But the man who can write one good sonnet may be justly said to be a poet, though he have done no more than that to entitle him to the sacred name; and we have need to search long and in many places before finding anything more profoundly expressive of the wonder and awe of the soul of man brought face to face with the mystery of time than Hunt's 'Thought on the Nile.' As a whole, however, Hunt as a poet may be said to be the apostle of those who perceive nothing poetic that is not petty. There is the reverse of largeness in nearly everything from his pen. There is an affectation of the bird-like in the very movement of his

verse. Hunt chirps of hawthorn and lilacs. It is significant that in those later years in which he was 'astonished to find' that Wordsworth was 'not half the man' he took him for, the absence of the bird-like quality of music was almost the only reason assigned for the reduced appraisal. Hunt as a poet is certainly free from the reproach of having written as if he were ill, and the whole world a lazaretto. His was not 'Lazaretto poetry;' it was more open to the charge of cheerful perkiness. As frequently as his contemporary, who invented the name, he wrote poems that might properly be called *Gelegenheitsgedichte*—poems having reference to actual occurrences of life. But the occurrences were themselves trivial, and not such as properly came within the province of poetry. This was one of Hunt's two fatal errors. The other error was akin to this, namely that of writing too frequently from the standpoint of his own person. Landor said that many of the poets of his time were too fond of the unsubstantial, and too proud of the 'pure imagination' from which their conceptions were supposed to come. Landor loved only the poetry that was laid among actual men and women, and concerned itself with recorded actions. Goethe took the same side: 'Poetry is at its zenith,' he said, 'when it seems altogether external; the more it deals with the personal feeling of the writer the more it is on the downward path.' The point is one on which there may easily be a difference of opinion. Looking at the evidence of history, we find that the highest poets — Æschylus, Sophocles, Shakspeare,

Milton, and even Spenser at his best—stand always among actual men, and write about actual deeds. It is only the lesser poet who is endlessly spinning his web out of the entrails of what he calls his 'subjectivity.' That subjectivity of his is usually a matter of no moment to the world, however serious to himself. It perhaps concerns itself with lamenting the loss of some loved one by distance or death, and is often worthless to literature, and an abuse of poetry. Looking at the question from the point of view of art, we perceive that the 'objective' theme, however substantial, however full of strong human interest, and notwithstanding the garb of poetry in which it is enveloped, is after all little more than the prose of common life if a 'soul of sentiment,' if the 'subjectivity' of the writer is not breathed through it. The great poets who deal with externals are never so far the enemies of subjectivity as to omit to breathe through their work that elevated personal feeling which gives individuality, style and even humanity to poetry. Now, Hunt's grave fault was that in writing from the subjective standpoint,—probably for the reason that he could not find matter enough in the objective—his subjectivity was not always important. It was often trivial and petty: it was frequently effeminate, and hence it incurred, quite naturally, the ridicule of the robust Scotch 'bodies' with whom it was an axiom that a man could not talk of himself without being a coarse egotist. Assuredly in those days a man of Hunt's calibre could hardly talk of himself in poetry without loss.

A further cause of collision between Hunt and his critics was his affectation as a man. There were, indeed, men of healthy instincts to whom Hunt's character appeared wholesome and virile. 'I look upon the author of "*Rimini*,"' says Lamb to Southey, 'as a man of taste and a poet. He is better than so; he is one of the most cordial-minded men I ever knew—a matchless fireside companion. I mean not to affront or wound your feelings when I say, that in his more genial moods he has often reminded me of you. There is the same air of mild dogmatism—the same condescending to boyish sportiveness in both your conversations.' 'I thought him,' says Haydon, 'with his black bushy hair, black eyes, pale face, and "nose of taste," as fine a specimen of a London editor as could be imagined; assuming, yet moderate, sarcastic, yet genial, with a smattering of everything, and master of nothing, affecting the dictator, the poet, the politician, the critic, and the sceptic, whichever would at the moment give him the air to inferior minds of being a very superior man. I listened with something of curiosity to his republican independence, though hating his effeminacy and Cockney peculiarities.' Haydon was a man of thoroughly manly nature, and there is no getting rid of his portrait of Hunt. Everything justifies it. If Hunt's critic in *Blackwood* was indeed the stalwart son of a Paisley manufacturer, with hair like eagles' feathers and nails like birds' claws, we can at least understand his contempt of effeminacy, though we perceive none the less clearly the malice with which he exposed it.

But Hunt's personal affectations have an interest beyond the man. There is an interest, at once humorous and pathetic, in taking note of the fact that the mere outward bearing which men of genius in every age adopt towards the world, is sufficient of itself to give hint of their attitude not only towards the drama we call life, but the tragedy we call death, and the mystery known to us as the hereafter. There, for example, were Shakspeare and his coadjutors, when events of moment in politics and religion were overshadowing the mighty stage of the world, electing to devote their great energies to the mimic world of the stage. Perhaps they never gave a second thought to the futility of their calling, or reflected how after all it formed no essential part of life's business, but was only the idle amusement with which serious men occupied the intervals of life's serious duties. Perhaps, on the other hand, they were throughout conscious of all this, and clung to their pursuits as a sort of sarcasm on the noisy nothingness and 'momentary momentousness' of more pretentious occupations. They were a gay band of brothers, setting up their booths in empty stackyards, here to-day and gone to-morrow, dressed in their scarlet doublets, French blue hose, and white cockades; jauntily tripping down Eastcheap in the warmth of the afternoons, having spent their mornings in bed, and being about to see through their midnights at the Boar's Head or the Mermaid. They were great writers, and were fully alive to that fact. They could go a long way, when so minded, to solve the problems of life; but it

was a part of their solution of those problems that it was not well to think too much about them. So they never carried their mind on their tongue, or their heart on their sleeve, but with a light step they went in and out among their fellows with the sunshine in their eyes, and on their lips a song, or a badinage, a quibble, or perchance an execrable pun. But half a century had not yet gone by when all this company in scarlet doublets and white cockades was swept away, and the Puritan Milton and his colleagues came in with their sable cloaks, and with the 'rain and the wind in their faces.' Life had now become a more solemn problem, not to be solved by a cheery smile, not to be banished by jovial volatility, only to be met with a grave front, and to be followed constantly, even though it led high up to the 'beetling summit of the cliff,' or deep down to the shadows of the vale of tears. Scarcely more than a further fifty years brings us to yet another order of things. Men of genius are now dressed up to resemble animated bits of Dresden china. In shovel-hats surmounting periwigs, in silk stockings surmounted by gold-laced coats with stainless ruffles, Steele and Savage, and at length Sheridan, strut through life as though they think it a merry sort of comedy in which it is their part, as nature's first walking-gentlemen, merely to exhibit youth and high spirits, liberality and lavishness. Life is now a vulgar problem, 'to be solved by plenty of money and wine and pleasure.' There is nothing further to say concerning it; there is nothing more to find out respecting it—nothing, at least,

until the end of the brisk masquerade, when these gay, good-natured, sorry sons of genius ; these well-dressed, well-shaved dawdlers in life's pageant ; these bankrupts, now, in heart and health—Steele in his retreat in Wales, Savage in his prison at Bristol, and Sheridan in the impoverished home in London, where presently his creditors will go about to arrest him, dead—turn pale with awe at prospect of that Death which has so rarely hitherto occupied their thoughts. Then all this in turn goes by, and we come again to a race of serious men. Clad in dapple cloaks, three or four poets of solemn temperament leave London for the solitude of the mountains. They would have gone farther if the fates had favoured them. Life is now no longer a farce ; the days of men are few and evil ; the existing order of things is for the most part wicked and unjust ; it is the duty of every man to get out of this chaos, and make to himself a kosmos, where none need care for 'routs, dinners, morning calls, hurry from door to door, from street to street, on foot or in carriage.' Moreover, another revelation as to the meaning of life has been discovered, and external nature affords a solution of life's problems, which in its placid hopefulness has nothing in common with the turbulence of emotion which has been experienced when the older revelation—that of internal nature—has been appealed to. So Wordsworth, Southey and brethren betake themselves to the mountains of Cumberland, and from thence they send a clear voice that is heard above the din of Westminster elections, petitions of the borough of Honis-

ton, Chartist risings, and Young Ireland Rebellions and heard yet again when the babble of the many voices has died away. Following soon after, and indeed all but contemporary with, this company of recluses, comes a circle of men of whom Leigh Hunt—though least, perhaps, in genius—may be accepted as the representative; for there was something in his mind and feeling that placed him midway between Byron, Shelley, and Keats, and made him in a sense the interpreter of their weaknesses to the world. The texture of Hunt's own mind and feeling was feminine, and his bearing towards the world was effeminate. For him and for some of his friends there was nothing better worth love and reverence than the spirit of beauty. Life for certain of them was a quest for something between millinery and blue-china. Coming after the strong writers, who had just cut out of credit the showy masquerade of eighteenth-century manners and morals, they were as grown men, capable of strenuous endeavour, but busied with embroidery. Theirs was a view of life's functions which fed the fancy on dainties that surfeited it, but which had no stimulus for the mind, and for the heart had no solace. Existence was a little round of trivialities. True indeed there was a certain bluster of republicanism, and a curious parade of unbelief. In Shelley, at least, there was a sincere, if vague, effort after improvements of which human society was thought susceptible. In Keats there was an elevation of feeling touching the poetic office that would have been worthy of Milton. But all this did not establish their masculinity. Both the re-

publicanism and the unbelief of the Hunt coterie hovered constantly over the borderland of personal feeling. The republicanism came largely of hatred of the Prince Regent, and of the Liverpool-Castlereagh administration; the unbelief came of instinctive distrust of the hierarchy of 'that detestable religion—the Christian.'

That Leigh Hunt and his circle, from the wee Cornelius Webb to the 'volcanic' Byron, narrowed down the focus at which they viewed the problem of life could not escape the observation of smaller as well as larger men than themselves. A manly robustness of sentiment must needs have led the stalwart and healthy person who is suspected of having written on the banks of Windermere the abuse of them in *Blackwood*, to despise the effeminacy that under the light of sun or moon could allow capable men to present each other with bouquets of roses and wreaths of bay-leaves and locks of hair, and to address sonnets to each other commemorative of mutual genius and prophetic of future fame. That the critic in question was carried away by his hatred of this flustering Cockneyism into ridiculous depths of personal malignancy is obvious enough to the reader of the foregoing pages. But what he then saw and despised, others less stirred by private animosity must still see and regret. Hunt in his own person was neither the incestuous monster whom *Blackwood* depicted, nor the 'Cockney-bred setter of rabbits' whom Moore satirized, nor the 'honest charlatan who talked Punch in pure simplicity of heart,' with whom

Byron quarrelled. Neither was he what Shelley called him—

‘ One of those happy souls
Which are the salt of the earth, and without whom
This world would smell like what it is—a tomb.’

He was merely a man whose texture of mind and feeling was, as we say, feminine, and whose bearing towards the world was effeminate.





KEATS.

WHEN we speak of authors who were wronged by their critics, the mind turns first to the two young poets who lie together in the Protestant cemetery at Rome. There are many of us who are old-fashioned enough to believe, notwithstanding much that has very properly been said by Lord Houghton and Mr. William Rossetti, that brutal criticism did more than anything else to kill Keats in the year 1821. It is beyond question a good thing to show that manliness is an element of the literary character; but we fail to see that this is an element that may not coexist with a very keen sensitiveness to what people say about us. He who, without flinching, can bear to be told that he is 'a shallow fool,' and that his poetry is 'drivelling idiocy,' is surely a little too amiable for this unamiable world: he, on the other hand, whose friends are silent when he is charged with indecency and a desire to raise the banner of a black ambition, 'whose only aim is to ruin society,' may not fairly be charged with want of manliness if it become known that he has drooped

under the heavy load of unmerited obloquy. It was Byron's ill-judged sneer at Keats—

‘ Strange that the soul, that very fiery particle,
Should let itself be snuffed out by an article ’—

that set men's wits to work to overturn that impression of Keats's susceptibility to criticism, which was at first entertained by Shelley and all, or almost all, the friends that were nearest to Keats. It would have been wiser to upset Byron's inference than to disturb the facts. It was not an article merely that ‘ snuffed out ’ the soul of the poet, but all the actual personal injury that was threatened and indeed inflicted by a series of articles. It is, as the present writer has elsewhere said, a circumstance little thought of in the discussion of this matter, that literature had presented the only possible prospect of a livelihood to Keats ; and that when, by reason of the severity of criticism, literature was found likely to fail him, he was left a doomed man, not only without an independence, but with shattered health and with a painful love project on hand, in regard to which there remained no longer the shadow of any hope that it would finally be realized. Keats might properly have said :

‘ — you take my life
When you do take the means by which I live.’

To live is, as Dante truly says, often a greater proof of a firm soul than to die ; but Keats was such a one as Sydney Smith pathetically describes, walking with bare feet and naked breast, jaded, mangled, and chilled, against driving misery and through stormy

sorrows over the Alpine paths of life. What wonder if such life seemed to Keats—much more than to his contemporary who said so—

‘ — a waste of wearisome hours
Which seldom the rose of enjoyment adorns;
And the heart that is soonest awake to the flowers
Is always the first to be touch’d by the thorns.’

Keats’s first volume was published in 1817. It is a common mistake to say that this book was hardly noticed at all. It was constantly alluded to in the prominent periodicals. Moreover, Keats enjoyed a measure of distinction as a poet before the appearance of this collection of the miscellaneous products of his youth. In 1816, the *Examiner* had spoken of him as one who was likely to revive the early vigour of English poetry. This compliment from the quarter whence it came was perhaps a doubtful one, and certainly in its results it was disastrous.

‘Endymion’ was published in 1818. The following is a part of the text of the notorious notice of the poem which appeared in the *Quarterly* in that year :

‘Reviewers have been sometimes accused of not reading the works which they affect to criticize. On the present occasion we shall anticipate the author’s complaint, and honestly confess that we have not read his work. . . . Indeed we have made efforts almost as superhuman as the story itself appears to be to get through it . . . and we are no better acquainted with the meaning of the book through which we have so painfully toiled, than we are with that of the three which we have not looked into.

‘It is not that Mr. Keats (if that be his real name, for we almost doubt that any man in his senses would put his real name to such a rhapsody) has no powers of language, rays of

fancy, etc.—he has all these ; but he is unhappily a disciple of the new school of what has been somewhere called Cockney poetry ; which may be defined to consist of the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language. . . . The author is a copyist of Mr. Hunt ; but he is more unintelligible, almost as rugged, twice as diffuse, and ten times more tiresome and absurd than his prototype. . . . Of the story we have been able to make out but little ; it seems to be mythological, and probably relates to the loves of Diana and Endymion ; but of this, as the scope of the work has altogether escaped us, we cannot speak with any degree of certainty. . . . At first it appeared to us that Mr. Keats had been amusing himself and wearying his readers with an immeasurable game at *bouts rimés* ; but, if we recollect rightly, it is an indispensable condition at this play, that the rhymes when filled up shall have a meaning ; and our author, as we have already hinted, has no meaning. He seems to write a line at random, and then he follows, not the thought excited by this line, but that suggested by the *rhyme* with which it concludes. There is hardly a complete couplet inclosing a complete idea in the whole book. He wanders from one subject to another, from the association, not of ideas, but of sounds, and the work is composed of hemistichs which, it is quite evident, have forced themselves upon the author by the mere force of the catchwords on which they turn.’

Several public animadversions were called forth on the occasion of this article in the *Quarterly*. One of these, appearing in the *Morning Chronicle*, pointed at political animosity as the evil spirit that lay at the root of the attack. ‘If,’ said the writer, ‘Mr. Keats will give up the society and friendship of Mr. Leigh Hunt, he will win the approbation of the *Quarterly Review*.’ ‘We really think so,’ said the *Examiner*, quoting this remark ; ‘but Mr. Keats is of such a spirit that he will stand by his friend.’ The *Alfred*, an Exeter paper said :

‘We have met with a singular instance, in the last number of the *Quarterly Review*, of that unfeeling arrogance, and cold

ignorance, which so strongly marked the minds and hearts of Government sycophants and Government writers. The poem of a young man of genius, which evinces more natural power than any other work of this day, is abused and cried down in terms which would disgrace any other pens than those used in the defence of an *Oliver* or a Castles. We have read the poetic romance of "Endymion" (the book in question) with no little delight; and could hardly believe that it was written by so young a man as the preface infers. Mr. Keats, the author of it, is a genius of the highest order; and no one but a Lottery Commissioner and a Government Pensioner (both of which Mr. William Gifford, the editor of the *Quarterly Review*, is) could, with a false and remorseless pen, have striven to frustrate hopes and aims so youthful and so high as this young poet nurses. . . . Does the author of such poetry as this deserve to be made the sport of so servile a dolt as a *Quarterly Reviewer*? No. Two things have struck us on the perusal of this singular poem. The first is, that Mr. Keats excels in what Milton excelled—the power of putting a spirit of life and novelty into the heathen mythology. The second is, that in the structure of his verse, and the *sinevy* quality of his thoughts, Mr. Keats greatly resembles old Chapman, the nervous translator of Homer. His mind has "thews and limbs like to its ancestors." Mr. Gifford, who knows something of the old dramatists, ought to have paused before he sanctioned the abuse of a spirit kindred with them. If he could not feel, he ought to know better.'

The *Examiner*, October 11th, 1818, quoted in full the article from the Exeter paper, and this reproduction of praise constituted the sum of Hunt's 'loud and earnest defence of Keats' down to August 2nd, 1820.

So we see that, in 1818, a reviewer in the *Quarterly* believed, or affected to believe, the author's name to be an assumed one which was then first affixed to the poem 'Endymion.' Had not the name, forsooth, an unreal ring? and was it not beyond belief that any sane mind could father, deliberately and dispassionately, a work so devoid as 'Endymion' was of all

traces of reasonableness of conception, so wanting in all good qualities of execution, in judgment, in sincerity, in lucidity, in facility, in directness, in cadence, in affluence of expression; in short, so clearly the outcome of certain evil moments of the period of first youth, when the imagination is in a ferment and the whole nature in a turmoil? Perchance the music of the strange cognomen had sunk into the soul of the moody and unlovely young poet, even as the music of the name of his chief imaginary personage had gone into his being, soothing him with the soft flattery of a fitness that should be beautiful, and of a harmony that should be tender and pensive!

Well, if the tree may at all times be known by its fruit, then may it fairly be said that the critic who wrote in this strain of rudest superiority was not usually deficient in poetic insight. He earned a word of warm eulogy from Coleridge for acute, spirited, sometimes stinging, but always argumentative and honourable criticism, in days when the approved mode of conducting critical journals seemed to that master of fair and philosophical investigation little better than the art of the gossip, the backbiter, and the pasquillant. But over against his arbitrary and petulant verdict, pronounced on a work which he confessed he had not read, let us place in transfiguring contrast a prophecy that has proved in all respects coincident with the result. 'I think I shall be among the English poets after my death.' So wrote the author of 'Endymion,' at that time the author of 'Hyperion' also. He was then unmoved, for a brief

period at least, by the goadings of repeated public charges of nonsense or lunacy, as well as by his own much more painful domestic criticism : calm in the modest, if assured, consciousness of high and enduring genius, which could well afford to be true to its own impulses without the least shadow of any thought of the public. This was before the experience of still another untoward year had gathered about that consciousness yet bitterer feelings of disappointment and defeat.

Between the critic and the criticized, the world has long given judgment. Where the one found only alternate raving and madness, and tameness and imbecility, unrelieved by play of healthy passion or sparkle of pure intelligence, the other has discovered a noble creative power, deep and strong, if very far from universal. And now let us leave the blunder where we find it. The stone that was the rejected of the builders has become a corner-stone in the temple : the name that was believed to be a cloak behind which undistinguished inefficiency sought to hide her nakedness, has already taken rank with the names of not the least of the demigods. Rest has followed the heartache of long ago, and of the ludicrous error of shortlived criticism — there an end. Had we not before, and have we not since, endured equal evil with less outcry ? Little will it serve us to add the brand of uncandidness to that of obtuseness or of profligate political partisanship to both. He who values honesty as an element of criticism will fain feel that political rancour could scarcely spend itself in high

places, even by the feeblest of side-blows, on such a puny political entity as Keats was at the best; while the lover of Keats, who troubles himself to read more of the *Quarterly* of 1818 than the four pages which contain all that was published of the opprobrious review in question, will probably find room enough for the impression—amounting at times to certainty—that the critic was, as we say, a man who desired sincerely to make public his principles of judgment in poetry, and blundered oftenest in deduction from his self-constituted code of laws.

The review in the *Quarterly* concludes with the entreaty that if anyone should be so bold as to purchase this 'Poetic Romance' of Leigh Hunt's simple neophyte, and so fortunate as to discover a meaning in it, he will be good enough to make the reviewers acquainted with his success, and then the *Quarterly* will return to a task which it now abandons in despair. But though the *Quarterly* said no more on the subject, many a responsive bray came from contemporary periodicals; and of these, as Mr. Rossetti observes, 'our friend "Z" of *Blackwood's* was the most jubilant in his eagerness to write himself down an ass.' This is what he says:

'His (Keats's) friends, we understand, destined him to the career of medicine, and he was bound apprentice some years ago to a worthy apothecary in town. . . . Whether Mr. John had been sent home with a diuretic or composing draught to some patient far gone in the poetical mania, we have not heard. . . . This much is certain, that he has caught the infection and that thoroughly. . . . The frenzy of the "Poems" was bad enough in its way; but it did not alarm us half so seriously as the calm, settled, imperturbable, drivelling idiocy of "Endy-

mion." . . . We hope, however, that in so young a person, and with a constitution originally so good, even now the disease is not utterly incurable. Time, firm treatment, and rational restraint do much for many apparently hopeless invalids ; and if Mr. Keats should happen, at some interval of reason, to cast his eye upon our pages, he may perhaps be convinced of the existence of his malady, which, in such cases, is often all that is necessary to put the patient in a fair way of being cured.'

'Mr. Hunt,' the critic says, 'is a small poet but a clever man : Mr. Keats is *a still smaller poet*, and he is only a boy of pretty abilities which he has done everything in his power to spoil.' In conclusion the critic ventures to make one little prophecy, that Johnny Keats's bookseller would not a second time venture £50 upon anything he can write.

'It is,' *Blackwood* says, 'a better and wiser thing to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet ; so back to the shop, Mr. John, back to "plaster, pills, and ointment-boxes," etc. But, for Heaven's sake, young Sangrado, be a little more sparing of extenuatives and soporifics in your practice than you have been in your poetry.'

An enduring reply to the injustice of this critique is furnished by the critic himself only two years later, when, in view of Keats's developing renown and fast-maturing genius, he says :

'What is the spell that must seal our lips from uttering an opinion . . . concerning Mr. John Keats, viz., that nature possibly meant him to be *a much better poet than Mr. Leigh Hunt* ever could have been. . . . The truth is, we from the beginning saw marks of feeling and power in Mr. Keats's verses, which made us think it very likely he might become a real poet of England.'

It is hard to find a palliative that we can plead for such mendacity as is seen in the two extracts here brought into juxtaposition from the distance of the two

years that separate them. But the example is not a solitary one. We can find at least ten other instances in point, all equally convicting and equally astounding, from the first ten volumes of the more pretentious *Edinburgh Review*. It is ever so. When a man of clear genius presents himself, envy and a thousand bad passions (not to speak of what Wordsworth terms pure, honest and absolute ignorance) intervene to impede his progress. Progress, by which in this case one means reputation, is what Falstaff calls honour—a mere escutcheon, that will not live with the living, because detraction will not suffer it: it keeps company with the man who died o' Wednesday. But the impulse to endeavour in the writer, as in the fighter, comes from within, and despite petulant abuse the worker holds on his way. Step by step, day by day, he rises to that place from which no malice can pluck him. Then, suddenly, the ragged regiment of all critical blunderers who have assailed him with the bludgeon of personalities and railed at his work in notes of rancorous hatred, lay claim to a share in his reputation on the pretence that they have contributed to raise it. As often as not it is the least excellent portion of a man's work that gets the loudest applause. One remembers the story of the Grecian orator who was interrupted in the middle of his harangue by the rabble shouting their plaudits: the compliment was felt to be a doubtful one, and the orator turned round to a candid friend and asked if he had said anything foolish.

It was well remarked by Haydon that the greatest

calamity to Keats was his being brought before the world by a set who had so much the habit of puffing each other, that everyone connected with it suffered in public estimation. Haydon had ample personal cause to feel keenly the disadvantages of such an un-avoidable position. The northern critics were not slow in identifying the painter of the 'Lazarus' in certain of the art notices printed in the *Examiner*. In 1820, *Blackwood* ('Mr. Wastle's Diary') said :

'It is a pity that this young man, John Keats, author of "Endymion," and some other poems, should have belonged to the Cockney School, for he is evidently possessed of talents that, under better direction, might have done very considerable things. As it is, he bids fair to sink himself entirely beneath such a mass of affectation, conceit, and Cockney pedantry, as I never expected to see heaped together by anybody except the great founder of the School. What in the name of wonder tempts all these fellows to write on Greek fables? A man might as well attempt to write a second Anastasius without going into the East. There is much merit in some of the stanzas of Mr. Keats' last volume which I have just seen; no doubt he is a fine feeling lad—and I hope he will live to despise Leigh Hunt, and be a poet—

'"*After the fashion of the elder men of England.*"

If he wants to see the story of the "Lamia"—which he has spoiled in one sense and adorned in another—told with real truth and beauty, and explained at once with good sense and imagination, let him look to Wieland's "Life of Peregrinus Proteus," vol. first, I think.'

With Keats, now sixty years dead, fame has not dealt tardily. Death, that seemed pitilessly to cut short his young life, rich with promise, was not without its uses in emphasizing his worth. Indeed, before death came, a flood of grateful recognition had poured itself forth upon his name. The *Blackwood*

of 1819 sought, clumsily, but with right feeling, to undo the work of the *Blackwood* of 1818, and the *Edinburgh* of 1820, from whatever motive of sincere admiration or political revenge, to reverse the decree of its London rival.

The *Edinburgh* said :

‘ We had never happened to see either of these volumes till very lately, and have been exceedingly struck with the genius they display, and the spirit of poetry which breathes through all their extravagance. That imitation of our older writers, and especially of our older dramatists, to which we cannot help flattering ourselves that we have somewhat contributed, has brought on, as it were, a second spring in our poetry ; and few of its blossoms are either more profuse in sweetness or richer in promise than this which is now before us. Mr. Keats, we understand, is still a very young man ; and his whole works, indeed, bear evidence of the fact. They are full of extravagance and irregularity, rash attempts at originality, interminable wanderings, and excessive obscurity. . . . A great part of the work, indeed, is written in the strangest and most fantastical manner that can be imagined. It seems as if the author had ventured everything that occurred to him in the shape of a glittering image or striking expression—taken the first word that presented itself to make up a rhyme, and then made that word the germ of a new cluster of images—a hint for a new excursion of the fancy—and so wandered on, equally forgetful whence he came, and heedless whither he was going, till he had covered his pages with an interminable arabesque of connected and incongruous figures that multiplied as they extended, and were only harmonized by the brightness of their tints and the graces of their forms. . . . There is no work, accordingly, from which a malicious critic could cull more matter for ridicule, or select more obscure, unnatural, or absurd passages. But we do not take that to be our office ; and just beg leave, on the contrary, to say that anyone who, on this account, would represent the whole poem as despicable, must either have no notion of poetry or no regard to truth.

‘ It is, in truth, at least as full of genius as of absurdity ; and he who does not find a great deal in it to admire and to give

delight, cannot in his heart see much beauty in the two exquisite dramas to which we have already alluded, or find any great pleasure in some of the finest creations of Milton and Shakespeare. . . . To an unpoetical reader such passages always appear mere raving and absurdity—and to this censure a very great part of the volume before us will certainly be exposed with this class of readers.'

To soothe down the fire which harsh misjudgment had kindled in Keats, to heal the heart that was breaking, the just tribute of merited applause came late. Already he was as one who had writ his name in water, and not the crown of laurel, cool to the tired brow, could bring back the lost years of peace. But death itself could not remove altogether the scars left by the old quarrel. In 1823 (two years after Keats's death) *Blackwood*, in reply to an article in the *Edinburgh* on Shelley's 'Posthumous Poems,' said :

'Now the whole of this is made up of direct mis-statement and base misrepresentation. In the first place, long before any Tory review whatever took notice of Keats, he had not merely been puffed in the *Examiner*, but he had put forth sonnets upon sonnets of his own in honour of Leigh Hunt, calling Leigh Hunt 'a kind martyr,' etc., because he had been clapped into Newgate for a beastly libel upon his sovereign ; and, in short, had identified himself in a hundred different ways with all the bad political principles, as well as with the bad poetical taste, of the Cockney School. Here, therefore, is one clear mis-statement as to matter of fact. In the second place, it was not, as is so plainly insinuated, the author of the "Baviad and Mævid" who commenced the attack upon Keats. Keats had been dished—utterly demolished and dished by *Blackwood*—long before Mr. Gifford's scribes mentioned his name. The *Quarterly Review* did not invent the name "Cockney School," but only adopted that name after it had been introduced by *Blackwood* into universal use, and had in fact become as much an integral part of the language of English criticism, as any other phrase in the dictionary. It is then absurd, and worse

than absurd to say that Mr. Keats would have altered his condition in any respect whatever, by trying to conciliate the smile of the *Quarterly* editor. It is possible, and indeed it is highly probable, that he was vexed with finding himself and the rest of the Cockney School characterized in the *Quarterly* by the phrases which *Blackwood* had invented. But that was a mere flea-bite. All the other reviews had adopted the tone ere then. The concern was utterly undermined three years ere the *Quarterly* put a single pickaxe to its foundation. As for the absurd story about Mr. John Keats having been *put to death* by the *Quarterly*, or by any other criticism, I confess I really did not expect to meet with a repetition of such stuff in the *Edinburgh Review*. If people die of these wounds, what a prince of killers and king of murderers must Mr. Jeffrey be! In law, the intention makes the crime, and he who fires a pistol at my body is a murderer, although he happens to miss me, or although I recover of the wound he inflicts. Granting, then, that this is the law, what are we to say to the man who cut up Byron's "Hours of Idleness"? That review, surely, was *meant* to be as severe as any review touching poor Johnny Keats. . . . But let us hear no more of Johnny Keats. It really is too disgusting to have him and his poems recalled in this manner, after all the world thought they had got rid of the concern. I would just ask any candid man this question: 'What did Keats write?' 'Keats!' would be the answer; 'I never heard the name. Oh yes; I do remember something—*Keats*—was it Keats you said? Are you sure you don't mean Cottle?'

A year later (1824) *Blackwood* said:

'Mr. Shelley died, it seems, with a volume of Mr. Keats's poetry "grasped with one hand in his bosom"—rather an awkward posture, as you will be convinced if you try it. But what a rash man Shelley was, to put to sea in a frail boat with Jack's poetry on board! Why, man, it would sink a trireme. In the preface to Mr. Shelley's poems, we are told that "his vessel bore out of sight with a favourable wind;" but what is that to the purpose? It had "Endymion" on board, and there was an end. Seventeen ton of pig-iron would not be more fatal ballast. Down went the boat with a "swirl"! I lay a wager that it righted soon after ejecting Jack.'

The *Edinburgh* article here dealt with was attributed by *Blackwood* to Bryan W. Procter. One of 'Mr. Mullion's Letters' says :

'I own, Bryan, you are pathetic on the subject of Jack. "Keats died young, and yet his infelicity had years too many. A canker had blighted the tender bloom that overspread a face in which youth and genius shone with *beauty*." (What ! beslobbering men's faces again—fie ! fie !) "The shaft was sped—venal, vulgar, venomous, that drove him from his country, with sickness and penury for companions, and followed him to the grave. And yet there are those who could trample on the faded flower—men to whom breaking hearts are a subject of merriment—who laugh loud over the silent urn of genius, and play out their games of venality and infamy with the crumbling bones of genius !" In this last passage you must allude to Cobbett and Tom Paine, for I know not any other person who made play with the crumbling bones of genius on, or rather under, the earth.'

Again, in their preface to the volume of the magazine for 1826, the editors of *Blackwood* say :

'Keats was a Cockney, and Cockneys claimed him for their own. Never was there a young man so encrusted with conceit. . . . In truth, the Cockneys themselves broke the boy's heart and blasted all his prospects. We tried to save him by wholesome and severe discipline—they drove him to poverty, expatriation, and death.'

One revoltingly brutal critique which appeared nearly twenty years after Keats's death may well bring our extracts to an end.

'A good deal of twaddle was levelled against the conductors of this review when they had the misfortune to criticize a sickly poet, who died soon afterwards, apparently for the express purpose of dishonouring us. . . . The article was not written with any intention of damaging Mr. John Keats' lungs or stomach. . . . But how are we to anticipate such contingencies? Must

we, then, adopt the wise precautions of our ancestors in cases of physical torture, and send the proofs to be read over in the presence of a physician who, thumb on pulse, might indicate the passages which are too much for human nature to endure?"

It has been said that Hunt's sole defence of Keats down to 1820 (Shelley's and Reynolds's are well known) consisted in the reproduction in the *Examiner* of the article published in the Exeter paper in reply to the *Quarterly*. We must not, however, omit the mention of any fact that seems to establish an argument for the purity of Hunt's friendship. When Hunt published his satire on Gifford (*Ultra-Crepidarius*) in 1823, he touched in his preface on the Keats article; and in the *Liberal* he had previously said, alluding to Gifford :

' Have I, these five years, spared the dog a stick,
Cut for his special use, and reasonably thick ?'

—pointing to the period of the *Quarterly* article on Keats as the time at which the satire had been written. Again reverting to the old *Quarterly* and *Blackwood* quarrels in his 'Lord Byron and his Contemporaries' (1828), Hunt says :

' I have since regretted, on Mr. Keats' account, that I did not take a more active part. The scorn which the public . . . would feel . . . before long was evident enough; but, in the meantime, an injury, in every point of view, was done to a young and sensitive nature, to which I ought to have been more alive. *The truth is, I never thought* about it, nor, I believe, did he, with a view to my taking any further notice. . . . I little suspected at that time, as I did afterwards, that the hunters had struck him; that a delicate organization, which already anticipated a premature death, made him feel his ambition thwarted by those fellows; and that the very imputation of being im-

patient was resented by him, and preyed on his mind. *Had he said but a word to me on the subject, I would have kept no measures with them.*

It was an assertion frequently made during Keats's lifetime that as a poet he did not progress. It is true that Keats's arch enemy, 'Z' in *Blackwood*, professed an opposite opinion; but Keats was then on the highway to distinction, and 'Z' was always 'fonder of warming his hands at a fire already in a blaze than of blowing one.' That Keats did not mature was one of the earliest, and remains one of the latest, critical errors concerning him. The point merits more than passing mention. The lack of proportion which was the conspicuous defect of the poet's early method had almost disappeared before the close of the four years that covered his active career. Perhaps his genius would ever have hovered over such an exquisite sense of the luxurious in animated imagery as would have made the chaste shapeliness of a balanced creation a difficult thing to him. But the tissues of his sensuous phantasy were being rapidly separated by keen experience. His earliest works sparkled with the many-coloured brightness of a prism; his latest works began to glow with the steady presence of a purer light. Scheme in his first efforts was often subordinated to incident, incident to image, image to phrase. It is fair to say that in the days when Keats was yet within what he called the Infant Chamber of Sensation in the mansion of life, he was more intoxicated with the delight of Spenser's allusion to the 'sea-shouldering whale' than with the Titanic

sublimities of 'Macbeth.' Shakspeare's own youth ran riot with a like wantonness. Before Marlowe's influence had given shape to his abundant fancy, before the revelation of life's misery, pain, and oppression had come on him with a sad suddenness in the atmosphere of the Chamber of Thought, Shakspeare, like Keats, had revelled in mere love of poetic luxury. But signs are not wanting that even before the completion of 'Endymion,' judgment was doing its work with Keats. Poetic phantasy became greater, and yet the disposition unduly to yield to it became less. Then one after one of the few poems that followed—'Hyperion,' 'Lamia,' 'Isabella,' 'The Eve of St. Agnes'—revealed Keats's strengthening power over the fixed laws of proportion, and his increasing command over the universal sensuousness that ran wild in the earlier days. We cannot see more clearly to what perfectness the art of this poet had attained than by glancing at a poem which, though little known and less talked of, is one of the last and the loveliest he gave us. The ballad 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' is wholly simple and direct, and informed throughout by a reposeful strength. In all the qualities that rule and shape poesy into unity of form, this little work strides, perhaps, leagues in advance of 'Endymion.' That more ambitious work was in full sense poetic, soft and rich, and sweetly-linked. This harmonious gem is, as Dobell might have said, higher than poetic, it is a poem. As a tale of mid-day witchery it is, though slight, as flawless as the first part of 'Christabel,' and immeasurably in

advance of its own author's 'Lamia.' As a work of sheer beauty there are few poems to match it.

'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.

* * * *

'I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.'

Here is no waste of creative force, no transparent suasion of rhyme such as in earlier days was wont to break the spell of vision: no starting off to the two-and-forty palaces of sublimity: no flinging forth of half-realized pearls of conception. The cool fancy weaves its web with contained purpose, and the unexhausted imagination sees rising up before it the woe-begone face of him who lingers long in solitary places that are silent of the song of birds, and who is desolate as are the groves they haunted. The ballad is simple and direct, but not of a simplicity and directness proper to prose. In this poem the poet moves through an atmosphere peculiar to poetry: lacing and interlacing his combinations of thought and measure; incorporating his meaning with his music; thinking to the melody of his song, and listening to the beat of rhythm echoing always ahead of him. The beautiful fragment entitled 'The Eve of St. Mark' will furnish the necessary supplement to these remarks; and if it be objected to what is here advanced that the Ariosto-

like 'Cap and Bells' and the loosely-knit 'Otho the Great' do not prove that Keats's genius was maturing, it must be replied that the structural imperfections of the latter should not be charged against him, and that the poor babble of the former shows only that Keats, like every lesser man, was subject to hours of inequality, such as may not fairly be measured against his best and happiest moments. The Sonnets show his progress. The fine one on Chapman's 'Homer' came early, it is true, as also did the fanciful one on the 'Flower and Leaf;' but these came leashed with many a poor draft such as no judicious lover of the poet would grieve to see suppressed. Later came 'The Day is Gone,' 'As Hermes Once,' 'On the Elgin Marbles,' and 'Bright Star.' Those who declined at Keats's death to believe in the growth of his powers, were labouring to discredit his genius by attaching thereto the idea that it had been preternaturally developed. But Keats was by no means what we call a prodigy. The growth of his genius was at first quick, but it was afterwards as gradual as the dawn of a fair day. We know that the day that dawns slowly may know the heat of noon, and see the radiance of a red sunset; but the day that dawns suddenly, flooding the sky with mid-day blue before the sun has reached its first hour's height, must soon be overcast. Through the dazzling light of such a morning the early herdsmen are sometimes seen to lead back the flocks they tend to the folds that will be required to shelter them. But no such splendour of dawn in Keats's case gave

rise to fears that his genius might not go on to its perfect day.

It was, as we have seen, the constant practice of the critical press to speak of Keats as a small satellite revolving about Leigh Hunt. This was one of the penalties the younger poet paid for his intimacy with the elder one, who, though a man of genius, was certainly not a man of sense, least of all of common sense ; otherwise he must have saved his followers those indignities to which his own imprudence too often left them open. In *Blackwood* Keats was almost invariably spoken of as 'Johnny Keats.' 'He was as little like Johnny Keats,' said the poet's brother, 'as the Holy Ghost.' The name is significant of the attitude adopted towards him by unfriendly critics. He was a wee bardling who stuffed sonnets into the pockets of King Hunt ; who talked pure Punch from a stool, for the gratification of a small circle that delighted in his precocity, and who got as reward the plums of the *Examiner's* puffery. Even friendlier eyes—those of Coleridge for example —recognised in Keats only an imaginative boy, sometimes ecstatically inspired, moving forward in this solid-seeming world, in moods that were both intellectually and sensuously vacillatory, and scarcely known to himself. And indeed critical insight seems never yet to have got at the moral core of Keats. What was that moral core ? It was nothing less than the moral core of a great teacher. Let us examine this point.

It is easy to waste words in digging beneath the surface of Keats's poetry for ethical meanings that were

never hidden there, but it is quite as easy to undervalue his sense of what was due from him as a man. True, he said, 'We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us, and if we do not agree seems to put its hands into its breeches-pocket;' but in a higher and happier moment he said: 'I find earlier days are gone by; I find I can have no enjoyment in the world but continually drinking of knowledge. I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good to the world. Some do it with their society; some with their art; some with their benevolence; some with a sort of power of conferring pleasure and good humour on all they meet—and, in a thousand ways, all dutiful to the command of nature. There is but one way for me. The road lies through application, study, and thought. I will pursue it.'

Indications are not wanting that Keats at one period turned all his soul to the love of philosophy. He was never a weakling; his earliest prose quite clearly proves that the romantic boy who seemed to live in a world of Naiads and Sirens might have reached distinction in any—the most austere—literary walk. Year after year feeling and experience did their work with him. Perhaps at the beginning, and indeed even down to the end, he over-rated the Paradise of Sensation in contrast with the Paradise of Mind:

'Beauty is truth'; truth Beauty—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.'

But Keats was far from indifferent to the problems of human life and destiny. By gradual transition he

was daily rising to where the 'burden of the mystery' no longer weighs on men. Here is moral teaching which, though concrete, not abstract, in expression, is possessed of almost philosophic definiteness :

'Stop and consider ! Life is but a day,
A fragile dew-drop on its perilous way
From a tree's summit ; a poor Indian's sleep,
While his boat hastens to the monstrous steep
Of Montmorenci. Why so sad a moan ?
Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown ;
The reading of an ever-changing tale ;
The light uplifting of a maiden's veil ;
A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air ;
A laughing schoolboy without grief or care
Riding the springy branches of an elm.'

It may be true that Keats's mind with its loving yearning after loveliness seemed always to have a look southwards. Or it may be true that his whole nature, saturated in sensuousness, appeared to follow, 'like the sunflower, the sun constantly,' and to fly from the chill north unvisited by the sun's rays. But he could look steadfastly on the grey shadows of life.

'Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan.
Where Palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs
Where Youth grows pale and spectre-thin and dies ;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs ;
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes ;
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.'

Keats knew the full bitterness of the shadowed

valley. About his own steps there fell but too frequently the beat of misery's many feet. On him also, however wrapped in poetic luxury, the stress of city life weighed heavily. Even of poverty itself he was not wholly forgotten. Perhaps he fled to his ideal world from the very fangs of London misery. Certainly as much may be said for his first great and obvious imitator, Tom Hood, whose 'Whims and Oddities' were not more surely spontaneous, than designed as foils to the excesses of a sympathetic temperament which, in view of the thousand sore trials of life, sometimes steeped that poet to the lips in pathos. Within the Chamber of Maiden Thought, into which Keats had but newly entered when the end came, he felt the atmosphere heavy with the sobs of the multitude of the oppressed; and to him, as to Seneca, the voice of suffering was sacred, and seemed through the mist of good and evil to go up to God. Out of the darkened passages in the mansion of life he saw no outlet, but he believed he would one day see his way there clearly, for he knew the veil of so much mystery, behind whose folds he walked darkling, must yet be drawn aside. He says: 'To this point was Wordsworth come, so far as I can conceive, when he wrote "Tintern Abbey," and it seems to me his genius is explorative of those dark passages. Now, if we live and go on thinking, we too shall explore them. He is a genius and superior to us in so far as he can, more than we, make discoveries and shed a light on them.'

This may not be profound teaching, but it gives

palpable hints of that moral core we speak of. Perhaps, as Keats himself hinted, the chance of leaving the world suddenly impressed a sense of his duties upon him. We may sometimes see in what but too-opportune moments his self-reproaches as to mis-directed energies were wrung from him. It may not be unjust to say that if he had lived longer and known the throb of perfect health he might have sunk for a time into grossness. Let that go by. How soon Keats would have risen above the bias of his own sensuous nature, even up to the heights of great purpose, we may not know. Already in the fragment 'Hyperion' we see him sitting awhile at the feet of Milton, than whom no man held his phantasy under stronger command. Keats was the true heir of Shakspeare's early fancy : would he have inherited Shakspeare's later imagination? He was learning to know and love the old Italian poets : would he at last have stood where Dante sat and laved with him his forehead in the same river of resignation? Truly we may not know ; but we see him before the completion of his twenty-third year already conscious that the Infant Chamber of Sensation, wherein he first thought to delay for ever, must very soon be passed. 'I take poetry to be the chief, yet there is something else wanting. . . I find earlier days are gone by. . . I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good to the world. . . There is but one way for me. . . I will pursue it.'

It is undoubtedly true that this moral core in Keats, which might have resulted in his becoming a great

teacher of men, did not restrain him from exhibiting in his own person much moral weakness. The record of his life, beautiful and pathetic as it is, leaves him in some measure open to the charge, recently made by Mr. Arnold, of being deficient in those powers of self-command and, if need be, of self-abasement which give true dignity and nobility to life. He began the world, as Haydon says, full of hopes, fiery, ungovernable, expecting every prize to fall beneath his powers. This is the usual delusion of impetuous youth, and men who are sobered by experience and made wise by the sense of weakness are slow to dissipate it. The world does that only too speedily. Meantime this irrational hopefulness transforms the real to a dream. It is well for the dreamer if he comes very soon to know that it is a dream ; if he can convince himself very early that the world could easily dispense with him ; that over hopes as high as his the waters of oblivion constantly creep. But Keats realized all this only when it was too late to profit by it. 'Unable,' says Haydon, 'to bear the sneers of ignorance or the attacks of envy, not having strength of mind to buckle himself together like a porcupine, and present nothing but his prickles to his enemies, he began to despond, flew to dissipation as a relief, which, after a temporary elevation of spirits, plunged him into deeper despondency than ever.' If with the consciousness of peculiar powers Keats had possessed sobriety of temper, he could never have fallen into this pitfall of despair. He would have perceived from the first that the chances were at least equal

that the world would not come to a general pause as the result of any effort he might put forth ; that of him, as of men of humbler pretensions, it was painfully true that the void that would be made if he were to fall entirely out of the count would probably be unperceived, while the stolid world would glide along as if he had never been. This bitter lesson Keats had yet to learn, and at what a price ! ‘ My life since my betrothal,’ he says, ‘ is like brass upon the palate.’ ‘ Poor fellow !’ says Haydon, ‘ his genius had no sooner begun to bud, than hatred and malice spat their poison on its leaves, and, sensitive and young, it shrivelled beneath their touch.’ Keats had less mental strength than Chatterton, and more moral courage. Chatterton could withstand every enemy save death, Keats every enemy save life. Chatterton, like Keats, was proud and ambitious, hated rank and longed for power. The poems he had written as a boy had fallen flat on the dull senses of his townspeople. Bristol had starved Savage, and might starve him also. London would surely know better how to reward his genius ; and so at seventeen to London Chatterton went. But the dawn of fame was long in breaking over the long night of neglect, and he who waited for the morning grew weary and faint. Down-right assault Chatterton could have borne and returned it with tenfold bitterness, but sheer neglect was killing him. Hunger added her pangs to those of disappointed hope. The indifference of the grim cruel world was wearing him away. Finally, at seventeen years and nine months Chatterton had decided

that no further day in the life that might remain to him was worth waiting for. Keats was of another mettle. The scorn that would have made a strong man of Chatterton, made a weakling of him ; Chatterton courted it ; he sank under it, and fell into excess as an escape from it. But never was scorn more cruel or mature man more destitute of a sense of the charm that pertains to the hopefulness of youth than in his case. When Mrs. Hoppner went to Gifford to remonstrate with him on the subject of his article, she found him totally insensible to all reproach or entreaty. 'How can you, Gifford,' she said, 'dish up in this dreadful manner a youth who has never offended you?' 'It has done him good,' replied Gifford, removing for a moment his green shade from his eyes as he paused in his writing. 'It has done him good ; he has had £25 from Devonshire.'

Before Keats was schooled by misfortune, he had that infirmity of mind abnormally developed which is at once the most common and the most perilous in the literary character. His sense of the dignity of the poetic office was as lofty as Milton's, but his thirst for fame was at first almost abject. Not that he would have bent the knee for an instant to secure it. He was too proud for that. It was true that he could have humbled himself to nothing but 'the eternal spirit of beauty and the memory of great men.' None the less, however, was ambition doing its pernicious work with him. Certainly it would appear that the thirst for fame eats out of the heart much of all the good it ever contained. It makes men envious

in relation to the world without, and selfish and exacting at home. To the pitiful claims of reputation, the man who is a slave to it may sacrifice not only his own happiness, but the happiness of everyone about him. The horror of 'dying nameless' torments him; and when he is lifted above the reach of that bugbear, the desire to attain yet greater heights haunts him with something of the relentlessness of the successful gambler's craving for another and yet another throw. The thing is with him night and day, and every pleasure, every hope must yield to its remorseless sway. It would be nothing or next to nothing if this passion or mania were limited in its influence to the man whose ambition engendered it. We should despise him for his bondage, we should dislike him for his egotism; but there an end. Not so constrained, however, is the influence of the thirst for fame; and when it takes its selfish hold of innocent persons who have done nothing to foster it, and turns the joy of their lives to gall, baffling their hopes, hanging like a dead weight on the nimbleness of their spirits, we hate and loathe the mean souls who are slaves to it. It would be unjust to Keats—even in the face of his letters to Brown, to Woodhouse and to Miss Brawne—to say that he was such a slave. But perhaps it was only the bitter schooling he received from the early scorn of his critics that saved him from that bondage. In this sense even Gifford may have been good to him. To the last, however, and when he had given hint of indifference to public applause, he was not without a

keen sensitiveness to censure. He was ready to give the labour of a lifetime to escape the odium of having done nothing for the art he professed. But his sacrifice earned for him mortification and discomfort alone. He had worked continuously, but it was only at 'digging his deep furrow in the sides of the hard mountain of fame,' at the bottom whereof lay the tomb of the writer. 'If I should die,' he says, 'I have left no immortal work behind me; nothing to make my friends proud of my memory.' This is, indeed, a pitiful spectacle of conscious impotence, and none the less pitiful because we know that it is untrue. Keats had in reality left an immortal work behind him, but it is not the fact itself that now concerns us. The temper in which the words were spoken shows but too plainly that the impetuous youth who began by expecting the world to fall beneath his powers, had already followed the funeral of his own ambition.

But Keats had not yet reached the last act of his life's drama. With the failure of his hopes as an author came the failure of his worldly prospects. Hunt tells us that his patrimony, which was inconsiderable, he had freely used in part, and even risked altogether, to relieve the wants of others. Thus the poverty which he had taken up from choice had its beautiful side—but only so long as it remained possible that by his labours in literature he could cope with it. Poverty in itself is rarely beautiful. The poverty that triumphs over its victims is the poverty of squalor and wretchedness; but the poverty that is triumphed over and

'victoriously bound under-foot,' is beautiful beyond all the beauty of wealth, and pathetic beyond all its pathos. Cheerful, loyal endeavour under the restraints of necessity—an unmurmuring obedience to the fate one did not make and cannot alter—is more touching and more noble than the splendours of opulence and the triumphs of success. Keats's poverty was never the poverty of squalor, but it was far from 'victoriously bound under-foot.' In one of his letters to his betrothed, written immediately before his departure for Italy, he says: 'At this moment I should be without pence, were it not for his (Charles Brown's) assistance.'

When on his death-bed his resources were so far reduced, that had he lived many days longer he must have been dependent in his isolation and wretchedness upon his heroic friend Severn for daily necessities as well as for society and solace. But for this climax of catastrophe the cruelty of his critics was of course only partially responsible.

And when the worn-out toiler among men at length reached his last act, how did he act it? Bent beneath the weight of a weary, wasting disease—all too rapid, nevertheless, and relentless—he had heard his own dirge while he still lived. Exiled from home and kindred—if in truth either of these he can be said to have had—there, in Rome, he lay, with a heart grown violent and intemperate, moody and suspicious; finding love itself vain beyond the vanity of unrequited affection, and fruitless with the fruitlessness of passion that could never be appeased; yearning to be resigned

and pensive ; struggling to project his misery and see it, yet knowing not one day of peace or night of respite ; dragging out weary days in a world no longer his, yet clinging to life with the grasp of one who would drain life's cup to its lees. Was it with fortitude he went through his last act, or with fear ? With neither, but with a crushing sense of failure. From his very desolation he might have gathered courage, for were there not some in every age who 'slept soundly with no parent's tears on their faces' ? But where was the philosophy that could gather comfort from contempt ? Keats to his own thinking had failed, and he was dying in the very midst of failure. He had staked much and lost all—his final throw had taken love and life together. The last words of this 'lost wanderer from Arden' are terrible in their burden of agony ; they are as the wail of one who calls across a waste of dead water, and hears only his own cry return to him.

'The whirligig of Time brings in his own revenges.' The game with Keats was no sooner lost than it was won. The Reviews—*Blackwood* excepted—that had spurned him while he lived, lost no time in canonizing his virtues now he was dead. They went speedily to the extreme of idolatry. Indeed, not to say it irreverently, within a year of the poet's death his modest wraith might reasonably have imitated the old Scotch deacon, who, when his health had been proposed in too flattering terms, arose at the highest point of the hep-hep-hurrahing and exclaimed : 'Remember, gentlemen, I am but a man !' It is not too much to say

that the fame of Keats soon after his death was purer and less equivocal than that of any poet among his surviving contemporaries. But what a sarcasm on the contemporary criticism that fact involves !





SHELLEY.

THAT Shelley did not regard himself as a member of any school of poets is obvious enough in all references to himself in his published correspondence; that he did not think he could be understood to have anything in common with Keats is seen in his preface to *Adonais*, and that he believed he gravitated by force of sympathy much closer to the Lake School, as represented by Coleridge, than to the Cockney School, as represented by Hunt, is also sufficiently obvious. In all this he was largely, though not entirely right, but whether he was right or wrong, in his assurance of poetic isolation does not here concern us. In the eyes of contemporary critics he was a cockney, and that is the sole point of interest to us now. We did not hesitate to reproduce the personal charges made against Leigh Hunt, but we took care that our selection should be in great part from the more presentable of many prurient libels. No one now accredits the imputation that the private life of Hunt himself was reflected in the 'Story of Rimini.' It seems it is otherwise in the case of Shelley. The

mawkish sensibility of many good people is even yet tortured by certain unhappy events in the life of this poet, and there are those who will say that much of the criticism of Shelley's contemporaries must serve, if here reproduced, no better purpose than to become food for the 'synodical individuals' who make it their pass-time or kill-time to worship with something of Egyptian superstition the meanest insects, if only (as Coleridge puts it) 'the brainless head be atoned for by the sting of personal malignity in the tail.' To unearth the more serious of the Shelleyan slanders will probably be accounted dangerous, however completely they may be fenced by the comments of an editor: dangerous alike to the esteem in which we have grown to hold Shelley's character, and to the general cause of public morality. The present writer is of another opinion, and the reasons that have prevailed with him to deal frankly with the whole sum of the charges against the poet's life shall in due course be assigned.

At eighteen years of age Shelley made his first appearance in print as a poet. Together with his sister Elizabeth he published a volume of 64 pages small octavo, entitled 'Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire.' His first critic was the *Poetical Register* (1810-11).

The review ran as follows :

'There is no *Original Poetry* in this volume : there is nothing in it but downright scribble. It is really annoying to see the waste of paper which is made by such persons as the putters-together of these 64 pages. There is, however, one consolation

for the critics who are obliged to read all this sort of trash. It is that the crime of publishing is generally followed by condign punishment in the shape of bills from the stationer and printer, and in the chilling tones of the bookseller, when, to the questions of the anxious rhymers how the book sells, he answers that not more than half-a-dozen copies have been sold.'

It was not until seven years later than the date of this article that Shelley received from the periodical press any special and individualizing attention, though in Dublin he received some press-notice. Just as it happened to Wordsworth to be for years constantly alluded to, but not named, in articles published on Southey in the *Edinburgh Review*, so it occurred to Shelley to be for a time the subject of unfavourable anonymous mention in articles published on Leigh Hunt in the *Quarterly Review*. Perhaps the earliest of such notices appears in the review of 'Foliage' (*Quarterly*, January, 1818). The writer is remarking that when we consider the compositions of many of those with whom the author under notice records his sympathy and agreement, we can have no hesitation in assigning to certain passages of his work a most important and offensive object; and in a note to this sentiment he writes:

'One of these (*i.e.* compositions) is now lying before us—the production of a man of some ability, and possessing itself some beauty; but we are in doubt whether it would be right to lend it notoriety by any comments. We know the author's disgraceful and flagitious history well, and could put down some of the vain boasting of his preface. At Eton we remember him notorious for setting fire to old trees with burning-glasses, no unmeet emblem for a man who perverts his ingenuity and knowledge to the attacking of all that is ancient and venerable in our civil and religious institutions.'

Later on in the article the reviewer dwells with

becoming horror and disgust upon the career of a certain friend of Hunt's, in whom Shelley is easily identified :

Mr. Hunt may flatter himself with possessing a finer eye and a warmer feeling for the loveliness of Nature, or congratulate himself on the philosophic freedom with which he follows her impulses—he may look upon us and all who differ from him as dull creatures who have no right to judge of his privileged opinions. Our path may indeed be a plain and a beaten one, but at least it keeps us from some things that seem to be grievous errors—new names and specious declamations do not deceive us. We should not, for instance commend as singularly amiable the receiving great and unmerited favours to be returned with venomous and almost frantic hatred ; we are at a loss for the decency which rails at marriage, or the honour which pollutes it ; and we have still a reluctance to condemn as a low prejudice the mysterious feeling of separation which consecrates and draws to closer intimacy the communion of brothers and sisters. We may be narrow-minded, but we look upon it still as somewhat dishonourable to have been expelled from a University for the monstrous absurdity of a “mathematical demonstration of the non-existence of a God.” According to our understandings, it is not proof of a very affectionate heart to break that of a wife by cruelty and infidelity ; and if we were told of a man, who, placed on a wild rock among the clouds, yet even in that height surrounded by a loftier amphitheatre of spire-like mountains, hanging over a valley of eternal ice and snow, where the roar of mighty waterfalls was at times unheeded from the hollow and more appalling thunder of the deep and unseen avalanche—if we were told of a man who, thus witnessing the sublimest assemblage of natural objects, should retire to the cabin near and write *ἀθροος* after his name in the album, we hope our own feeling would be pity rather than disgust ; but we should think it imbecility indeed to court that man's friendship, or to celebrate his intellect or his heart as the wisest or warmest of the age.'

We find that the *Quarterly* reviewer speedily came to a conclusion as to whether it was right to lend notoriety to Shelley's work by the publication of his

sapient comments, for in April, 1819, he devoted a long article to the two versions of the poem now known as 'The Revolt of Islam.' The review opens with the intimation that Shelley is one of that industrious knot of authors, the tendency of whose works the reviewers have in their late numbers exposed to the caution of their readers ; then the article goes on to say that of all his brethren Shelley carries to the greatest length the doctrines of the sect, and is, for that and other reasons, by far the least pernicious among them, because the very *naïveté* of his manner deprives his pernicious principles in some measure of their venom :

“Laon and Cythna” is the same poem with “The Revolt of Islam”—under the first name it exhibited some features which made “the experiment on the temper of the public mind,” as the author calls it, somewhat too bold and hazardous. This knight-errant in the cause of “a liberal and comprehensive morality” had already sustained some “perilous handling” in his encounters with prejudice and error, and acquired in consequence of it a small portion of *the better part of valour*. Accordingly “Laon and Cythna” withdrew from circulation ; and happy had it been for Mr. Shelley if he had been contented with his failure and closed his experiments. But with minds of a certain class, notoriety, infamy, anything is better than obscurity ; baffled in a thousand attempts after fame, they will still make one more at whatever risk—and they end commonly like an awkward chemist who perseveres in tampering with his ingredients, till, in an unlucky moment, they take fire, and he is blown up by the explosion. . . . Mr. Shelley is no penitent ; he has reproduced the same poison, a little, and but a little, more cautiously disguised.’

It must have been a matter of some surprise to Shelley to learn that he was an ‘unsparing imitator’ of the Lake poets. In freedom from errors of taste in the use of language, and in smooth and harmonious

versification, he is said to resemble Southey ; and it is further alleged that 'he draws largely on the rich stores of another mountain poet, to whose religious mind it must be matter of perpetual sorrow to see the philosophy which comes pure and holy from his pen, degraded and perverted, as it continually is, by this miserable crew of atheists or pantheists, who have just sense enough to abuse its terms, but neither heart nor principle to comprehend its import, or follow its application.' As to 'Laon and Cythna'—

——'its merits and its faults equally conspire against it ; it has not much ribaldry or voluptuousness for prurient imaginations, and no personal scandal for the malicious ; and even those on whom it might be expected to act most dangerously by its semblance of enthusiasm, will have stout hearts to proceed beyond the first canto. As a whole it is insupportably dull, and laboriously obscure ; its absurdities are not of the kind which provoke laughter, the story is almost devoid of interest and very meagre ; nor can we admire Mr. Shelley's mode of making up for this defect—as he has but one incident where he should have ten, he tells that one so intricately, that it takes the time of ten to comprehend it.'

The reviewer proceeds to say that Shelley is a philosopher by courtesy of the age, and has a theory respecting the government of the world ; and of this theory the writer goes on to give the outlines, to state the manner in which it is demonstrated, and the practical consequences proposed to be deducted from it. The pith of the definition comes in the closing passage, of which the first clauses apply solely to 'Queen Mab :'

'——kings have introduced war, legislators crime, priests sin ; the dreadful consequences have been that the earth has lost her fertility, the seasons their mildness, the air its salubrity, man his freedom and happiness. We have become a foul-feeding, carnivorous race, are foolish enough to feel uncomfortable after the

commission of sin ; some of us even go so far as to consider vice odious ; and we all groan under a multiplied burthen of crimes *merely conventional* ; among which Mr. Shelley specifies with great *sang froid* the commission of *incest* ! . . . The laws and government on which Mr. Shelley's reasoning proceeds, are the Turkish, administered by a lawless despot ; his religion is the Mohammedan, maintained by servile hypocrites ; and his scene for their joint operation Greece, the land beyond all others of recollections of former glory and independence, now covered with shame and sunk in slavery. We are Englishmen, Christians, free, and independent ; we ask Mr. Shelley how his case applies to *us* ? or what *we* learn from it to the prejudice of our institutions ?

The reviewer's opinion of Shelley's claims as a philosopher are summarized in one succinct passage :

' Let him not be offended at our freedom, but he is really too young, too ignorant, too inexperienced, and too vicious to undertake the task of reforming any world, but the little world within his own breast.'

Though Shelley has not all that is odious and contemptible in Hunt, though he has not exhibited the bustling vulgarity, the ludicrous affectation, the factious flippancy, or the selfish heartlessness of that person, yet the *Quarterly* thinks that 'from early childhood he carried about with him a soured and discontented spirit—unteachable in boyhood, unamiable in youth, querulous and unmanly in manhood—singularly unhappy in all three.' As the reviewer closes his remarks on 'Laon and Cythna,' 'Rosalind and Helen' is put into his hands, and he finds it 'less interesting, less vigorous and chaste in language, less harmonious in versification and less pure in thought ; more rambling and diffuse, more palpably and consciously sophistical, more offensive and vulgar, more unintelligible.' 'So,' reflects the writer, 'it must ever

be in the downward course of infidelity and immorality.' Shelley attributed first to Southey and afterwards to the Rev. H. H. Milman certain of the articles in the *Quarterly*. 'Priests,' he said, 'have their privilege.' Milman did afterwards write on Shelley in the *Quarterly*, but the articles here quoted from were neither by him nor by Southey. One of the *Quarterly* articles compared Shelley to Pharaoh in the Red Sea. 'It describes,' writes the poet, 'the result of my battle with their Omnipotent God; his pulling me under the sea by the hair of my head, like Pharaoh; my . . . entreating everybody to drown themselves; pretending not to be drowned myself, when I *am* drowned; and lastly *being* drowned.'

Such was the criticism of the *Quarterly*, vituperative yet consistent; but the criticism published contemporaneously with it in *Blackwood* was alternately hostile and encomiastic, and variable and inconsequential, in obedience to no discoverable or even conceivable principle. In January, 1819, *Blackwood* perceives in Shelley a member of the Cockney School, but one of greater genius than Hunt and Keats, 'who are men of considerable cleverness, but as poets worthy of sheer and instant contempt.' Whatever Shelley's errors may have been, his northern critic admits that he is a scholar, a gentleman,* and a poet, and as such must needs 'despise from his soul the

* 'It was Hazlitt, we believe,' says *Blackwood* (1828), 'who accused us of praising Shelley, because he was a gentleman; and we must confess that the accusation, however shocking, is far from being untrue, and affords an easy and satisfactory explanation to Hazlitt of much of our censure of himself.'

only eulogies to which he has hitherto been accustomed—paragraphs from the *Examiner*, and sonnets from Johnny Keats.* Ten months later *Blackwood* is even more emphatic in Shelley's praise, for it devotes a long article to the defence of his character as poet, philosopher, and man, against the aspersions cast upon all three by the *Quarterly*. Then a change comes over the spirit of this dream of good-fellowship. In 1820 *Blackwood* has gone the opposite length of 'despising Mr. Shelley's understanding,' and affirming that his 'private life has been a disgrace to humanity, and his poetry a blot on the literature.' One year later still, and Shelley has lost absolutely the good graces of his Scottish critic. He is now hopeless of poetic reputation, and lifting himself into notoriety on the stilts of blasphemy. One palliation of his outrages on life, philosophy, and letters *Blackwood* is still merciful enough to advance, namely, that it is mentioned in credible quarters that Shelley's reason had become unsettled. It is now realized that the *Quarterly* attacks were not only justified by the facts of the case, but highly commendable as bulwarks of all that was good in morality and beautiful in poetry. Clearly, however, as Shelley's lucubrations are perceived to be the ravings of imbecility or madness, they are made the subject of banter and lampoon. An elegy on the death of a friend affords a legitimate opportunity for

* It would be very unwise to spend strength in a wild-goose chase after such phantoms as these eulogistic sonnets by Keats on Shelley. 'Sonnets from Johnny Keats' was a stock phrase of ridicule in *Blackwood*.

consumedly ludicrous travesty. Why not? *Blackwood* realizes that Shelley has gone over to Cockaigne, and is a mouthpiece of the presumptuous triumvirate of Pisa. These are curious contradictions, but they do not stand alone as isolated and unaccountable inconsistencies, in the pages of the Magazine in question. At one moment *Blackwood* finds Coleridge, in his poetical character, the most servile of State servitors, in his domestic relations the most heartless ignorer of all the ties of propinquity, in philosophical claim the most daring of charlatans, and in poetic aspiration the most abject of pretenders. Scarcely two years later Coleridge has been raised in *Blackwood's* esteem to the rank of poet and seer, whose 'Christabel' may be employed on any man as a touchstone by which to judge whether or not he is sensitive to the appeals of the most magical element in poetry, and whose occasional utterances, let fall at table or upon the most casual encounter, are more to be observed than the set speeches of the Hazlitts at the Surrey and the Campbells at the Royal Institution. The obvious explanation of this radical change of tone is that the editorship has for practical purposes changed hands, and this accounts satisfactorily enough for much lamentable contradiction. There is excellent reason, nevertheless, to fear that under the same management was published the defence of Shelley (as a 'great poet in the very highest sense of that mysterious word'), and the heartless attack upon his 'Adonais.' The truth is that the public memory is notoriously a short one, and writers in the periodical press do not

always bargain upon seeing the conflicting utterances of succeeding years placed side by side, when interest or convenience seems to suggest that they should abuse to-day that which yesterday they applauded.

When Shelley published his 'Prometheus Unbound,' the critics said that whatever difference of opinion there might be as to his poetic merits, there could be none as to his audacity. The idea of his following in the footsteps of Æschylus was not less than appalling to Shelley's first critics. Putting this aside, *Blackwood* (1821) says :

'*Percy Bysshe* feels his hopelessness of poetic reputation, and therefore lifts himself on the stilts of blasphemy. He is the only verseman of the day who has dared, in a Christian country, to work out for himself the character of direct ATHEISM.'

On Shelley's method of art, the same critic says :

'He follows his own rhymes, and shapes his subject to the close of his measure. He is a glutton of all names of flowers, and smells, and tastes, and crowds his verse with scarlet and blue, and yellow and green ; extracts tears from everything, and makes moss and mud hold regular conversations with him.'

When the critic comes to review 'Adonais' he affirms that on principles such as these a hundred or a hundred thousand verses might be made without taking the pen off the paper. He himself undertakes the task, but mercifully stops short at a single stanza. He professes that the subject is indifferent to him ; let it be the 'Golden Age,' or 'Mother Goose,' or 'Waterloo,' or the 'Wit of the Watchhouse'—'Tom Thumb,' or 'Thistlewood.' By way of experiment the reviewer gives a touch

of his quality on a theme just then engrossing attention. A city-marshal broke his leg on Lord Mayor's-day, while walking truncheoned from the Mansion House to Blackfriars Bridge: so the event is celebrated in the following fashion, supposed to be satirical of the opening of 'Adonais':

'O weep for Wontner, for his leg is broke;
O weep for Wontner, though our pearly tear
Can never cure him. Dark and dimly broke
The thunder-cloud o'er Paul's enamelled sphere,
When his black barb, with lion-like career,
Scatter'd the crowd.—Coquetting Mignonette,
Thou Hyacinth fond, thou Myrtle without fear,
Haughty Geranium, in your beaupots set,
Were then your soft and starry eyes unwet?'

In his 'Adonais,' Shelley attacked *Blackwood* (by implication) very pointedly, and the northern censor revenged itself in these terms:

'Locke says the most resolute liar cannot lie more than once in every three sentences. Folly is more engrossing; for we could prove from the present elegy that it is possible to write two sentences of pure nonsense out of three. A more faithful calculation would bring us to ninety-nine out of every hundred, or—as the present consists of only fifty-five stanzas—leaving about five readable lines in the entire.'

One knows of nothing more amusingly audacious than this criticism of 'Adonais,' unless it be Voltaire's notorious criticism of a part of the soliloquy in 'Hamlet,' beginning, 'To be, or not to be.' 'A country bumpkin at a fair,' said Voltaire, 'would express himself with more decency and in nobler language.' Again the reviewer attempts to draw down ridicule on Shelley's poetical method, and produces the follow-

ing 'Elegy on my Tom-cat,' which strikes him, he says, 'to be as a poem incomparably less nonsensical, verbose, and inflated than "Adonais":'

ELEGY ON MY TOM-CAT.

'Weep for my Tom-cat ! All ye Tabbies weep,
For he is gone at last ! Not dead alone,
In flowery beauty sleepeth he no sleep ;
Like that bewitching youth Endymion !

* * * *

O bard-like spirit ! beautiful and swift !
Sweet lover of pale night ; when Luna's lamp
Shakes sapphire dew-drops through a cloudy rift ;
Purple as woman's mouth, o'er ocean damp ;
Thy quivering rose-tinged tongue—thy stealing tramp ;
The dazzling glory of thy gold-tinged tail ;
Thy whisker-waving lips, as o'er the swamp
Rises the meteor when the year doth fail,
Like beauty in decay, all, all are flat and stale.'

According to *Blackwood* the story of 'Adonais' is this :

'A Mr. John Keats, who had left a decent calling for the melancholy trade of Cockney-poetry, has lately died of a consumption, after having written two or three little books of verses much neglected by the public. . . . The New School, however, will have it that he was slaughtered by a criticism of the *Quarterly Review*—"O flesh, how art thou fishified !" There is even an aggravation in this cruelty of the *Review*—for it had taken three or four years to slay its victim, the deadly blow having been inflicted at least as long since. . . . The fact is, the *Quarterly* finding before it a work at once silly and presumptuous, full of the servile *slang* that Cockaigne dictates to its servitors, and the vulgar indecorums which that Grub Street Empire rejoiceth to applaud, told the truth of the volume, and recommended a change of manners and of masters to the scribbler. Keats wrote on ; but he wrote *indecently*, probably in the indulgence of his social propensities.'

The critic proceeds to say that Mr. P. B. Shelley

having been the person appointed by the *Pisan* circle of poets to canonize the name of 'this apprentice,' has produced an elegy in which he weeps 'after the manner of Moschus for Bion;' but the canonizer is worthy of his saint.—'Et tu, Vitula!'

The number of *Blackwood* in which this critique appeared had scarcely got clear of the press, when the news came from Italy that the waters of the Adriatic had swallowed up all that was dear to many in the personality of Shelley. When the body was washed ashore, a copy of Keats's 'Lamia' was found in the pocket of the coat; and surely the avalanche of reproach and indignation which in the preface to 'Adonais' was hurled upon Keats's calumniators, must then have applied at least equally to him, Keats's fellow-immortal, whose loyal admiration no ridicule found power to shake.

Vituperative as were the critics of the *Quarterly* and *Blackwood*, the critics of the *Literary Gazette* (alleged, without sufficient grounds, to be Campbell and his circle) were yet more defamatory. In 1820 the *Literary Gazette* published a long review of the 'Cenci.' After going into some particulars the critics say:

'This is the dish of carrion, seasoned with sulphur as spice, which Mr. Shelley serves up to his friend Mr. Leigh Hunt, with a dedication, by way of grace, in which he eulogizes his "gentle, tolerant, brave, honourable, innocent, simple, pure," etc., etc., etc., disposition. What food for a humane, sympathizing creature, like Mr. Hunt! if, indeed, his tender-heartedness be not of a peculiar kind, prone to feast on "gruel thick and slab" which "like a hell-broth boils and bubbles."'

A portion is then transcribed of the 'entertaining

scene' in which the author 'out-herods Herod, and outrages possibility in his personification of villainy, by making Count Cenci a character which transforms a Richard III., an Iago, and Sir Giles Overreach comparatively into angels of light.' Here follows the Banquet Scene in the Cenci Palace :

'This single example, which is far from being the most obnoxious, unnatural and infernal in the play, would fully justify the reprobation we have pronounced. Mr. Shelley, nor no man, can pretend that any good effect can be produced by the delineation of such diabolism ; the bare suggestions are a heinous offence ; and whoever may be the author of such a piece, we will assert that Belzebub alone is fit to be the prompter. The obscenity too becomes more refinedly vicious when Beatrice, whose "crimes and miseries," forsooth, are as the mask and the mantle in which *circumstances clothed her* impersonation on the scenes of the world is brought prominently forward. But we cannot dwell on this.'

The writers say that 'the lamentable obliquity of the writer's mind pervades every sentence,' and hence it will be readily felt by their readers why they cannot multiply their extracts. They give nearly three columns of extracts, nevertheless.

'Having said, and unwillingly said, this much on a composition which we cannot view without inexpressible dislike, it will not be expected from us to go into particulars further than is merely sufficient to enforce our warning. If we quote a passage of poetic power, it must be to bring tenfold condemnation on the head of the author—for awful is the responsibility where the head condemns the heart, and the gift of talent is so great, as to remind us of Satanic knowledge and lusts, and of "arch-angel fallen." . . . The characters are Count Cenci, an old grey-haired man, a horrible fiendish incarnation, who invites an illustrious company to a jubilee entertainment on the occasion of the violent death of two of his sons ; who delights in nothing but the wretchedness of all the human race, and causes all the

misery in his power ; who, out of sheer malignity, forcibly destroys the innocency of his only daughter ; and is, in short, such a miracle of atrocity, as only this author, we think, could have conceived. Lucretia, the second wife of the Count, a most virtuous and amiable lady, who joins in a plot to murder her husband ; Giacomo, his son, who because his parent has cheated him of his wife's dowry, plots his assassination ; Beatrice the daughter, a pattern of beauty, integrity, grace, and sensibility, who takes the lead in all the schemes to murder her father ; Orsino, a prelate, sworn of course to celibacy, and in love with Beatrice, who enters with gusto into the conspiracy, for the sound reason, that the fair one will not dare to refuse to marry an accomplice in such a transaction ; Cardinal Camillo, a vacillating demi-profligate ; two bravos, who strangle the Count in his sleep ; executioners, torturers, and other delectable underparts. The action consists simply of the rout in honour of the loss of two children, of the incest, of the murderous plot, of its commission, and of its punishment by the torture and execution of the wife, son, and daughter.'

In 1820 the *Literary Gazette* reviewed 'Prometheus Unbound' also :

'To our apprehensions "Prometheus" is little else but absolute raving ; and were we not assured to the contrary, we should take it for granted that the author was lunatic—as his principles are ludicrously wicked, and his poetry a *mélange* of nonsense, cockneyism, poverty, and pedantry.

'These may seem harsh terms ; but it is our bounden duty rather to stem such a tide of literary folly and corruption, than to promote its flooding over the country, . . . We yield ourselves, miserable humdrum devils that we are, to this high imaginative faculty of the modern muse. We acknowledge that hyperbole, extravagance, and irreconcilable terms, may be poetry. We admit that common-sense has nothing to do with "the beautiful idealisms" of Mr. Shelley. And we only add, that if this be genuine inspiration, and not the grossest absurdity, then is farce sublime, and maniacal raving the perfection of reasoning : then were all the bards of other time, Homer, Virgil, Horace, drivellers ; for their foundations were laid no lower than the capacities of the herd of mankind ; and even their noblest elevations were

susceptible of appreciation by the very multitude among the Greeks and Romans. . . . An these extracts do not entitle the author to a cell, clean straw, bread and water, a strait-waistcoat, and phlebotomy, there is no madness in scribbling. It is hardly requisite to adduce a sample of the adjectives in this poem to prove the writer's condign abhorrence of any relation between that part of speech and substantives : sleep-unsheltered hours ; gentle darkness ; horny eyes ; keen faint eyes ; faint wings ; fading waves ; crawling glaciers, toads, agony, time, etc. ; belated and noontide plumes ; milky arms ; many-folded mountains ; a lake-surrounding flute ; veiled lightning asleep (as well as hovering) ; unbewailing flowers ; odour-faded blooms ; semi-vital worms ; windless pools, windless abodes, and windless air ; unerasing waves ; unpavilioned skies ; riveted wounds ; and void abysms, are parcel of the Babylonish jargon which is found in every wearisome page of this tissue of insufferable buffoonery. . . . Alas, gentle reader ! for poor Tom, whom the foul fiend hath (thus) led o'er bog and quagmire ; and blisse thee from whirlwindes, starre-blasting, and taking. Would that Mr. Shelley made it his study, like this his prototype,

“How to prevent the fiend, and to kill vermin.”

* * * * *

Bitter and venomous as these reviews were, they were amiability and charity themselves compared with the notice of ‘Queen Mab,’ which the *Literary Gazette* published as late as 1821. Beginning by saying that the mixture of sorrow, indignation, and loathing with which the volume has overwhelmed them will, they fear, deprive them of the power of expressing their sentiments upon it, the critics proceed to express eleven columns of sentiments, of which the following are fair examples :

“Queen Mab” has long been in limited and private circulation, as a duodecimo ; and the first two or three cantos, under the title of the “Demon of the World,” were reprinted at the end of a poem called “Alastor ;” as was also the principal note against Christianity in a detached pamphlet. Though the hellish ingredients,

therefore, are now for the first time brought together into one caldron, they have, like those of the evil beings in "Macbeth," previously disgusted the world in forms of separate obscenity. . . . We are aware, that ordinary criticism has little or nothing to do with the personal conduct of authors ; but when the most horrible doctrines are promulgated with appalling force, it is the duty of every man to expose, in every way, the abominations to which they irresistibly drive their odious professors. We declare against receiving our social impulses from a destroyer of every social virtue ; our moral creed from an incestuous wretch ; or our religion from an atheist, who denied God, and reviled the purest institutes of human philosophy and divine ordination, did such a demon exist. . . . It is hardly worth while to ask how a theorist of Mr. Shelley's class would act in the relations between man and man. It can hardly be doubted but his practice would square with his principles, and be calculated to disturb all the harmonies of nature ; a disciple following his tenets, would not hesitate to debauch, or, after debauching, to abandon any woman : to such it would be a matter of perfect indifference to rob a confiding father of his daughters, and incestuously to live with all the branches of a family whose morals were ruined by the damned sophistry of the seducer ; to such it would be sport to tell a deserted wife to obtain with her pretty face support by prostitution ; and when the unhappy maniac sought refuge in self-destruction, to laugh at the fool while in the arms of associate strumpets. . . . Promiscuous intercourse of the sexes and individual courage of the soul to despise everything but the gratification of our appetites—this is the millennium promised by the votaries of Shelley.'

Shelley has furnished us with an adequate commentary on the foregoing in his letter to Lawrence, author of the 'Empire of the Nairs':

'I am a young man, not yet of age, and have now been married a year to a woman younger than myself. Love seems inclined to stay in the prison ; and my only reason for putting him in chains, whilst convinced of the unholiness of the act, was a knowledge that, in the present state of society, if love is not thus villainously treated, she, who is most loved, will be treated worse by a misjudging world. In short, seduction, which term

could have no meaning in rational society, has now a most tremendous one; the fictitious merit attached to chastity has made that a forerunner of the most terrible of ruins, which, in Malabar, would be a pledge of honour and homage.

‘If there is any enormous and desolating crime, of which I should shudder to be accused, it is seduction.’

And how did such attacks affect the poet?

‘If any of the reviews abuse me,’ he writes, ‘cut them out and send them; if they praise, you need not trouble yourself. I feel ashamed if I could believe that I should deserve the latter: the former, I flatter myself, is no more than a just tribute’ (1819).

‘I hear that the abuse against me exceeds all bounds. Pray, if you see any article particularly outrageous, send it me. As yet, I have laughed: but woe to these scoundrels if they should make me lose my temper’ (1821).

The purely literary relations of the ‘Cockney’ School and their critics have an interest (for all who care to look below the surface) similar in kind to that which attaches to the relations of the ‘Lake’ School and their critics. We have seen how hard it was to the writers of 1800 to judge of the ‘Lyrical Ballads’ apart from the standards of taste that grew out of a love of the ‘pointed and fine propriety’ of the school of Pope; and now we may see how hard it was to the writers of 1820 to escape from the influence of Wordsworth’s plea for the diction of real life, when called upon to judge of an order of poetry as unduly elaborated as was that out of which they had formulated their primary poetical canons. The critics resisted the theory of the ‘Lake’ School; but they were nevertheless insensibly and irresistibly influenced by it; and after twenty years’ enforced schooling, they found their attitude so altered that they must needs judge by the new test all work still newer. And they did

so. The only literary impeachment urged against the 'Cockney' poets (apart from the libellous one of their alleged desire to raise 'the banner of a black ambition whose aim was to ruin society'), in short, the only purely *critical* impeachment, was that, in their desire to employ a language that should be super-poetic, they affected a diction so far removed from the language of everyday life as to degenerate not rarely into gibberish. And there was justice in the accusation. The three early works of the three foremost poets of the school, 'Rimini,' 'Endymion,' and 'The Revolt of Islam,' are disfigured by much verbal artificiality; the clear result of an inordinate anxiety to avoid the commonplace. He who cares to pursue this thought may read with profit Hunt's remarks on his neologisms in his preface to the collected poems. In order to grasp the whole theory of the school in question, we have only to reflect upon all that is involved in Keats's rather audacious counsel given to Shelley, to put aside a little of his magnanimity and load every rift of his subject with ore. Here lies, we may think, the whole secret of the strength and of the weakness of the school; here, too, lies a key to the adverse tone of critics who were nurtured first on the poetry of Pope and afterwards on that of Wordsworth.

It will be seen by contrast of the foregoing extracts with the extracts embodied in previous chapters that there is this peculiarity in the animadversions published on Shelley during his lifetime—that the charges made against his private character preceded the misappre-

ciation of his intellectual labours, and were indeed, as Mr. Browning says, anterior to the knowledge of his earliest noticeable works, and not brought forward to counteract any impression they had succeeded in making. Usually it happens that the disbelief in the man succeeds the belief in the poet, and the misconception of an author's moral nature is either ignorantly or maliciously put forward to disturb our reception and enjoyment of his works. Such was the case in the instances of Coleridge, of Southey, even of Byron and Hunt. Such must be the case almost invariably, for the appetite for slander even in corrupt human nature is not so voracious that it can attempt to feed on nothing by making an obscure man famous for the sake of maligning him. Before the heart of the most mendacious calumniator can be tasked to the production of a given lie, there must be a subject sufficiently important to interest people in the falsehood. It was Shelley's peculiar misfortune that the order of that part of corrupt nature which regulates slander was reversed in his case. The public had not yet become conscious that he was the author of the delirious principles which found intemperate speech in 'Queen Mab,' before it was apprised that his private life was of a kind that afforded such principles a fearful commentary. And this fact, while it makes the origin of the worst accusations of Shelley's contemporaries the more difficult to trace, lays upon his admirers the more serious duty of not shrinking from an honest examination of the ambiguous passages in the poet's life. If simultaneously with the beginnings of a con-

spicuous literary reputation notorious in the promulgation of questionable moral principles, Shelley had become known even to the votaries of malice as a loose liver, the worst slanders of his traducers would have been easy of explanation on grounds of deliberate though plausible misconstruction and exaggeration. Where the disposition to personal abuse exists at all, it descends only too easily from the nature of the thing that it is proper to discuss into inferences that have no philosophical bearing upon it: out of 'Queen Mab' a charge of love of concubinage could readily have arisen, as a charge of incest came out of 'Rimini.' Now, if the disbelief in Shelley as a man preceded the disbelief in him as a writer, is it not reasonable to conclude that there had been that in Shelley's life which explained, if it did not justify, so exceptional a phenomenon? We know there had, and if we are wise lovers of the poet we will forbear, as Mr. Browning puts it, not more in justice to Shelley's critics than in policy to ourselves, to pour forth with too much intemperance of diatribe our wrath against the 'hypocritical hysterics' of those 'heirs of the dearest traditions of Scribes and Pharisees,' who took Shelley for what to unsympathetic observers he seemed to be but in truth was not. When Mr. Browning wrote his well-known Essay* more than thirty years ago, there was a pressing necessity that authentic notices of Shelley's career should establish the purity and beauty of Shelley's life as a whole, and acquit the poet of grave charges in the eyes of those who had

* 'Introduction to the Letters of Shelley.'

lightly condemned him on the evidence of reviews and gossip. But this necessity has long been met; the chain of biographical testimony in favour of Shelley's character has for years been complete enough to silence the worst of his slanderers; and now the more zealous worshippers of the poet are going the unwise length of diverting upon Shelley's calumniators the whole body of the malignancy that was once heaped upon him. Not content with proving that Shelley's character was on the whole simple and beautiful; that his was boundless benevolence and glowing philanthropy; that few are the instances with which we are supplied of sincerity like his coupled with his tenderness and matched by his courage, the lovers of Shelley, stepping on to the wrong side of idolatry, are practically denying that any of his acts were censurable, and least of all that any derogation from the reverence in which he is held need result from an examination of that one overshadowing incident in his life which furnished the first food for scandal, and suggested all further calumny. This is an attitude towards abuse which might have been becoming to the loyalty and eagerness of partisanship at the moment of attack; for then the mere vehemence and excess of praise must have been serviceable in counteracting the bitterness and depth of censure. But surely we have lived too long beyond the first period of the active life of the Shelley slanderers to look at them in any way but dispassionately, or to think it necessary to make feverish efforts to explain away the facts that tell against him: to 'sacrifice particular principles in favour of

absorbing sympathy.' Can we not now look fairly in the face the clear, simple, unambiguous facts of Shelley's desertion of his wife, and ask ourselves what we should say to-day if a writer of Shelley's notorious antecedents presented himself as an upholder of principles based upon, or at one with them? For it is only by such a view of the situation that we can arrive at a just idea of the measure of culpability in which at the best Shelley's detractors are for all time involved. Let us adhere to our disposition to believe in him, but let us be certain—as Mr. Browning has well said—that nothing must so shame and grieve Shelley as to see himself exalted at the cost of degradation to another.

A glance over the foregoing reviews will show that the charges against Shelley's private life and character made in the contemporary periodical press were these: (*a*) that he deserted his wife; (*b*) that he left her without material support; (*c*) that he tempted her in her abandoned condition to seek with her pretty face a livelihood by prostitution; (*d*) that he lived in open adultery; (*e*) that when his deserted wife sought refuge from sorrow in suicide, he laughed at her as a maniac with a bitter mockery; (*f*) that having broken down with damned sophistry the morals of a family, he contracted an incestuous alliance with two sisters at one time. Shameless as were many of these accusations, and indefensible as were all of them except two, they were presented in forms of malevolent speech, which constituted a separate offence. But in their sheer literalness, what is the truth respecting

them?—for the time has gone by when we can ignore them, and (Mr. Froude notwithstanding) the time has not yet come when we can persuade ourselves that they are forgotten.

With regard to the first count in the indictment, the poet stands convicted even in the mind of the most loyal of Shelleyans, who brings to a complete knowledge of the facts a competent judgment. There are grounds for inferring that towards May, 1814, Harriett was aware that Shelley desired to live apart from her; and that she herself in some sort made a reluctant submission to a proposal for separation. But there is no evidence that the separation was in fact made by mutual consent. On the contrary, Harriett denied to Peacock that there was any consent on her part. There are no documents published showing that Harriett was a party to the transaction. Moreover, letters of hers exist which state that when Shelley left her he permitted his absence to remain for some time unexplained. Biographers who are more jealous of the poet's honour than in this regard he was himself, may admit in guarded phrase that Shelley 'disappeared' from Harriett's 'cognizance, without making proper arrangements, or giving any warning or explanation of his intentions.' Such language may become those of us who are determined to have faith in him, but we must not expect that part of the world that refuses to sacrifice principle to sympathy to call Shelley's act by any other name than the unequivocal one of deliberate desertion. That Shelley left his wife without making provision for her material support

was a charge for which there was a colourable defence. When he left her about the middle of June, 1814, he gave her all the money he then possessed, but Harriett for herself and child had altogether no more than fourteen shillings in money. Almost certainly a fortnight elapsed in which she was without other means of support known to her husband than these shillings would afford. We shall not hesitate to say what we think—that a brave man (as Shelley indubitably was) without the least affection remaining for his wife, but with some shreds of fidelity outlasting love) should have remained with her until he could make proper provision for her support. We shall not hesitate to say what we further think—that if Shelley abandoned his wife and left her in London (her relatives being then in Bath), with only fourteen shillings of ready money and no reasonable assurance that before that pittance could be exhausted she would be furnished with further supplies, he richly merited the worst chastisement of his reviewers as the reward of pusillanimity and heartlessness. Let not our reverence for the divine poet make us blind to the derogations of duty in the man. We have a right to see how far the aspirations of the one square with the character of the other. But we must acquit Shelley on this second count, that of neglect; not because as an idealistic poet he might be adjudged deficient in worldly prudence and forethought, for Shelley is proved to have been eminently practical in small money matters; perhaps because his body as well as his soul was at this juncture in a turmoil, and the one was then as little as the other at

all favourable to the 'steady symmetries of conventional life.'

Later on Shelley manifested an anxiety, almost feverish, to see to his wife's material welfare. The neglect of which he seems to have been guilty during the last half of June, 1814, must be regarded as an accident: the accident probably of the poet's constitutional weakness, and the pitiful truce made with it by a laudanum-bottle. There was, therefore, a colourable pretext, and no more than this, for the statement current in Shelley's time that he had left his deserted wife without support. The further accusation of having tempted Harriett to prostitution was, when so stated, an infamous slander; yet there is a contemporary record which, if true at all, shows that the charge was not wholly groundless. In Dr. Polidori's 'Diary' there occurs this entry: 'He (Shelley) married; and a friend of his liking his wife, he tried all he could to induce her to love him in turn.' It must be said at once that the source of this statement is apocryphal: but even if untrue, the statement was current in the poet's private circle, and was not contradicted by the friends whose silence, according to the axiom, must have been the justification of enemies. How far such an act as that pointed at by Dr. Polidori would be an approximation to tempting a wife to prostitution must be a matter of opinion, where no code of formulated morality can pronounce judgment. There may be men who, like Mr. Rossetti, understand it in the sense that Shelley, *after* he had discovered the incompatibility between himself and Harriett, found also that

the happiness of a friend of his could be promoted by her, and that he then favoured the friend's suit with his wife. There are likely to be many more to whom such a transaction would seem to approach so nearly to procuration that there could be no need to split many hairs about it. Whatever the inference from the fact—if fact it was—Shelley must certainly have the benefit of the doubt respecting it. The fourth charge was one about which there could hardly be much discussion. That Shelley lived for two years in a connubial state which the laws of most civilized countries and the aggregate of opinion in many ages pronounce adultery is not open to dispute. What extenuating circumstances we are accustomed to put forth must arise at another moment for mention. Meantime there is no disguising the truth that if criticism of books has any proper dealings with the personal conduct of the authors—and Shelleyans are the first to say that subjective poetry may best receive elucidation from the personality of the poet, and that for love's and for understanding's sake the biography is as necessary as the poetry—then the early critics of Shelley were not seriously to blame that they took cognizance of his open violation of one of the doctrines of social life held sacred and inviolable. More serious, more dubious, more slanderous, was the charge that Shelley laughed at his wife as a maniac, when she took refuge from sorrow in suicide. That Harriett had a congenital tendency to self-destruction is obvious enough. What the immediate cause of her act may have been it does not here concern us to inquire.

Perhaps, as Mr. Kegan Paul says, that immediate cause was the shutting of her father's door against her. Or perhaps she was, as De Quincey says, stung to madness by calumnies incidental to her position as a woman abandoned by her husband, for the world is as merciless as a herd of deer to the creature that falls wounded in the chase, and gores it to a yet speedier death than that which already chills and saddens it. But of Shelley's grief, remorse, and horror upon receiving the news of his wife's suicide we have received through Dr. Garnett the most unequivocal testimony. Probably his feelings partook more of remorse than of grief: remorse at having undermined Harriett's sober and safe orthodoxy, wherein such a catastrophe would have been made the more remote by the more stringent principles of thought and life which orthodoxy must have induced. Be this as it may, Leigh Hunt says that the impression produced on the poet's sensitive nature by the tragical incident lasted in its first poignant freshness to the close of his life. There is but little to invalidate such evidence; yet when we come to judge of the accusation made by Shelley's critics, let us not forget that soon after Harriett's death Shelley applied to that poor forlorn outcast among women the name of a 'frantic idiot.'* This is not 'laughing at the fool while in the arms of associate strumpets,' but it is an outburst of intemperance totally unworthy of a fine spirit (however

* These and other statements are given on the authority of Shelley's most outspoken biographer, W. M. Rossetti, who combines with the most fearless truthfulness the most sincere enthusiasm.

distraught by the frantic act), and calculated to feed the malice of misapprehensive enemies. There remains but one further accusation of Shelley's detractors to treat of, and because it is the foulest of them all it shall be dismissed with the utmost brevity. That Shelley contracted an incestuous alliance with two sisters is a charge which no reasonably healthy nature will think it necessary to spend an hour in seeking to disprove. Jane Clermont was not the sister of Mary Shelley; she was not her blood relation; the particular act publicly charged against the poet in the *Literary Gazette*, and reported to him by Lord Byron, would at the worst have involved concubinage, not the grosser offence. Shelley's step-sister by affinity had already passed through a *liaison* with Byron,* and none can say whether it was to him or to the Hoppners with the Swiss nurse, or partly to him and partly to them, and partly to the evil spirits that always live in the 'hellish society of men,' that the vile calumny is due. Shelley was more deeply moved by it than might have been expected in one who had already openly disregarded

* Documents are said to exist which prove that Jane Clermont was never at any time Byron's mistress, and that the transaction which has become part of their history was suggested by the lady as an occasional psychological experiment in the union of the 'handsomest and cleverest man in Europe' and the 'handsomest and cleverest woman in Europe'! The story has a Byronic odour. It will cleanse Byron as little to blacken Jane Clermont as it cleanses Shelley to blacken Harriett Westbrook. It is hinted that papers are forthcoming which involve the last-mentioned in still deeper disgrace. No guilt (if it amounts to so much) on the part of the wife of Shelley will entirely absolve the poet himself in the eyes of men of the world.

the serious conventions of life. Stripped of the worst mask in which the charge was made hideous, it remains a loathsome thing ; but we must not be surprised to discover that our horror of it does not find a proportionate echo among persons who think that Shelley at his best must run the gauntlet of one accusation only less odious.

In judging of Shelley's character we have in recent years been wont to set aside conventionalities, whether they come of law or religion, and consider the acts of his life not so much by their essential rightness or wrongness, or what seems to be such, as by the standard of truth whereby he himself thought and spoke. We have been asking ourselves not how far Shelley's deeds were culpable in relation to the world as basis and beginning, but how far they adhered to his sincere conviction of what it was on the whole best for him to do. 'I call Shelley a moral man,' says Mr. Browning, 'because he was true, simple-hearted, and brave, and because what he acted corresponded to what he knew.' And again, 'In Shelley there was nothing of that jarring between the man and the author which has been found so amusing or so melancholy ; no dropping of the tragic mask, as the crowd melts away ; . . . what Shelley was, he was with an admirable sincerity.' Mr. Symonds, Mr. Rossetti, Dr. Garnett, Miss Blind, and others, have agreed with what Mr. Browning has so well said. But some of these lovers of Shelley appear to make a vain effort to rest on the horns of a serious dilemma. Persuaded that Shelley's was a nature as generous and self-oblivious as poor humanity

may ever see, they are compelled to allow that it was once capable of an act of desertion which in its intentions was selfish and in its results was cruel. In order to remove the apparent inconsistency between what the poet acted and what he knew, they then appear to show that the woman Shelley abandoned was no fit wife for him; and that it was well for the world—which is the richer by the productions induced by a happier alliance—and necessary for himself—who might have sunk into death on yet lower steps of youth as the result of an incompatible union—that he should put that woman away. The reasoning is dubious, for it overlooks the fact that in all discussion of the absolute morality of Shelley's act we must put aside the poet, who is not arraigned, and deal only with the man, who is. Not to question the statement that Harriett was unworthy of Shelley; that she was 'a splendid animal,'* but without the power to appreciate poetry or understand philosophy; not to point to the fact that for nearly three years the poet and his wife lived in comparative harmony, and that a few months before the separation they sealed their union with a second marriage, let us ask if a man establishes his character for truth, simple-heartedness, and bravery, according to Shelley's code, by consulting his own feelings primarily in breaking an alliance which he himself has made. It is probable that only those who know

* Just sixteen months earlier than the separation, Shelley was so far from finding Harriett 'a splendid animal' and no more, that he spoke of her in a dedication ('Queen Mab,' February, 1813), as the inspirer of all that was purest and noblest in his mind and soul.

what it is for an elevated spirit to be mated to an incomprehensive piece of physical prettiness can fully or rightly say what a clog such a union ever is upon the best aspirations of the soul ; and perhaps the bewildered soul of Shelley, sweating now under a new passion that brought agony and not solace, could see no way but flight out of the troubles that tortured it. But Shelley's was a nature too generous to find balm in such a Gilead ; it found the wormwood of remorse there. In taking the full measure of Shelley, let us face the fact that he lacked Shakspeare's masculinity. It is easy to believe that Shakspeare in later life grew tired of the uneducated daughter of a Warwickshire yeoman, whom he had married in youth, and perhaps under restraint. If so, we do not learn that he ever said he wished to be free of her ; like a sensible man of the world, he took without a murmur the fate that from the hands of fortune fell to him. As little can Shelley compare with Coleridge* in masculinity ; and still less with Goethe, who was able to marry and live happily with the 'bonnie lassie' Christiana Vulpius, after winning the noble love of Frederika, the parson's daughter of Sesenheim, and the admiration of the accomplished Baroness Charlotte von Stein. Nay, the 'apothecary's apprentice,' who has been lately laughed at for his outbursts of fretfulness, had more in him of the stuff out of which a strong man is

* More than once the lovers of Shelley have attempted to palliate his offence in deserting his wife, by coupling it with the so-called desertion by Coleridge of his wife and children ; but the cases of the two poets are entirely dissimilar, and possess no single point in common.

made. The letters of Keats to his betrothed, which are too commonly accepted as witnesses to some plague-spot of the petulant woman in his character, are proof of nothing so surely as his masculine command of a consuming passion which, in its strength, chastity, and unselfishness, only a great nature could conceive. It is true that Shelley's highest virtues overshadow everything of which Keats was capable: yet they were the virtues of a noble woman; Keats's virtues were the virtues of a man.

But if we allow that Shelley adhered in word and deed to sincere conviction; if we grant that what he acted corresponded to what he knew, are we therefore to conclude that he is rightly called a moral man? Though we set aside the religion which Shelley ignored, the world is surely our starting-point, and the aggregate of human opinion is our basis of all moral law. These, then—the world and human opinion—are what we have to consider in making our estimate of Shelley as a man. Let the multitude of men go on as we have allowed Shelley to begin, and what would morality be in a month? It would be the shadow of a reality—that, and no more. True, indeed, that Shelley died before his youth ended; true, too, that he must be considered 'as a whole, and at his ultimate spiritual standard, and not be judged of at the immaturity, and by the mistakes of ten years before.' And that spiritual standard was so exalted that we who love the poet need not shrink from looking fearlessly at the jarring elements of his character.

If the misapprehension of Shelley as a man preceded the misconception of him as a poet, the latter lost nothing of the virulence peculiar to it from the scurrility that is inseparable from the former. The world is always eager enough to associate, with the thing that is written, the vices that are believed to belong to the man who writes. Shelley's principles were said to square with his habits ; the doctrines he preached were understood to furnish an odious elucidation of the abominations he practised. Incest was alleged to be the appalling vice which he dissected with relish, or discussed with sympathy. We know that the premises were false ; but were there any grounds for inferences so damaging as those of Shelley's contemporaries, even from the facts as they came distorted through the medium of calumny ? The question opens up a problem that touches the vital point of Shelley's ultimate place as a poet.

When the wave of critical opinion on Shelley, having reached its ebb in the periodical press of 1822 to 1830, began to flow in his favour, it was customary for admirers to take the common ground of extolling the poet first of all for his ideality. Later critics with more acuteness perceived that the range and variety of Shelley's powers had been much understated. Then ensued a period in which the best of the poet's lovers maintained that mastery had been exhibited 'in six several and very diverse lines of poetic faculty.' Mr. Rossetti has classified these, as (1) the ideal, (2) the tragic, (3) the poetic-familiar, (4) the lyric, (5) the grotesque, (6) poetic translation. There

is nothing in this tabulated statement, as here given, which forbids us to determine Shelley's place in one of the too great classes into which all poets are divided, and which we call objective and subjective. But the analysis implies a claim it does not state. It is understood that the range and variety in question cover a combination of powers that secure to Shelley's genius a high rank in both classes. The 'Cenci' is expected to establish for him the position of a dramatic, and therefore of an objective poet, as certainly as the 'Prometheus' establishes for him that of an idealistic, and hence of a subjective poet. Now, is this reasoning tenable? for upon our answer to that question will be seen to depend not very remotely our estimate of both the intellectual and moral constitution of the poet and man. It ought not to be difficult to show that it is not tenable; that Shelley is a subjective poet only, and that being so, his poetry can receive most valuable elucidation from his life, which in turn can receive inestimable commentary from his poetry. First of all, let it not be denied that in the 'Cenci' Shelley suppressed, as he said, the peculiar feelings and opinions that characterized his other composition; further, that he 'attended simply to the development of such characters as it is probable the persons represented really were;' again, that the result is a tragic creation not inferior to the 'Remorse' as a poem, and incredibly greater as a play exhibiting passion and conveying sentiment; finally, let it be allowed that the work as a whole is the finest tragedy of modern times. Does

it therefore follow that Shelley's was a dramatic genius, or yet a lyric genius running into the dramatic? The question is one that can only be answered by an appeal to first principles. The dramatic (that is the objective) genius is both analytical and synthetical: it sifts and filters, it classifies and combines. But over and above these functions it has another function—that of the representative. The dramatic genius is primarily representative of man and the universe. It is untroubled by any thought of the tendency and teaching of what it projects into art. Its products have a tendency, and they have a teaching, but it remains for us to trace and interpret these according to our lights. The one great thing dramatic genius has to do is to sift, to filter and to classify the materials that lie at hand in life and to combine these into a structure that shall represent *life in little*. The lyric (that is the subjective) genius is neither analytical and synthetical nor representative, but idiosyncratic. It concerns itself first of all with the soul of the poet in whom it resides. It looks inward upon that soul, and if the soul itself look heavenwards, it also looks towards the Divine. Let us remark in passing, and not irreverently, that in the sense described, life and the universe itself are subjective creations, whereof the teaching is full of mystery until we betake ourselves to the Author of all, and from knowledge and love of Him gather hints of its purpose, and then the drama of life that seemed to have so many and such conflicting meanings appears harmonious and one. We perceive the bearing

of this when we step in each case from the genius itself to the man in whom it resides. The dramatic poet is of small or no consequence to the dramatic poetry. Imagine perfect dramatic poetry, perfect representative drama, and the man who gave it us is no longer valuable to study, for the work is there, and is self-interpretive. Not so in regard to the lyric poet. He is essential to a right understanding of his poetry. The impulses peculiar to his constitution have inspired his work; and hence whatever weaknesses he may have in his moral character, his productions must have in their intellectual nature. 'Macbeth,' the play, can stand alone without elucidation derived from knowledge of the man Shakspeare. But in order to see at once that Shelley's was not an objective, but a subjective genius, we have but to ask ourselves, 'Could the "Cenci" stand, as "Macbeth" stands, without a word of interpretation obtained through familiarity with the man who wrote it?' There can in reason be but one reply; and what is the simple ground of it? This: that 'Macbeth' appeals to the common eye of men here, now, everywhere and in all ages, because it represents life in little, because it treats of passions that every human soul has felt, and must, by the necessities of its existence, feel; while the 'Cenci' appeals to one human idiosyncrasy only—that which apprehends the hideousness and horror of an unnatural offence.

The importance of this distinction it is easy to perceive. If Shelley was a subjective poet purely, the

first question to ask is, 'How far was his subjectivity good and healthy?' for just so far will his poetry be pure and right. There has been nothing more true said on our subject of study—where much has been said with truth—than that 'we must betake ourselves to the poet's life before we determine some of the nicer questions concerning his poetry.*' The nicest question of all concerning Shelley's poetry is, 'Why was it that Shelley was twice fascinated by stories involving, nay hanging upon, incest?' A great poet recently taken from among us used to answer the question frankly, 'Because Shelley was deficient in passion.' It will seem strange if we have to agree with this conclusion: strange if the instinct which we usually account a part of our lower nature is after all essential to spiritual perfection. Yet so it is, and sooner or later we must perceive that a healthy development of passion is the only thing that can save us from finding a morbid fascination in offences against nature. We have grown accustomed to regard much of the poetic filth that comes to us from France as indications of passion abnormally indulged. Probably the exact opposite is the fact, and perhaps the instinct we are wont to decry, if it had been operative, would have spared us the 'Fleurs de Mal' and 'Justine,' and—not to couple too closely two of the meanest with two of the noblest products of genius—it would have spared us the revolting sides of Ford's 'Tis Pity,' and Shelley's 'Cenci' also. To prove that Shelley as a man was deficient in passion we need

* Mr. Browning.

mention one incident only in his life. Some time after his separation from Harriett, he proposed that she should return to him and take up a place as a member of his household, not as his wife, but side by side with the friend for whom she had been abandoned, and who still shared his bed.* This extraordinary proposal arose out of the most self-oblivious generosity, but what a commentary it affords on Shelley's masculinity! The man who had no more acute sense than this implies of the beautiful relation of the sexes that is determined by healthy nature may have had the noblest heart, but he was deficient in one attribute. And the fractious men contem-

* It is necessary to state that neither the exact proposal made by Shelley nor the exact evidence that any such proposal at all was made is known to exist; but as the story came in the first instance from Basil Montague there is doubtless truth in it. Still, if this be apocryphal, proof of the point raised in the text could surely be found in the letter written by Shelley to J. L. P., from Naples, Dec. 22, 1818, wherein the poet speaks of the 'wicked and mischievous insanity' of 'Childe Harold,' and adds, 'For its real root is very different from its apparent one. . . . L. B. associates with wretches who seem almost to have lost the gait and physiognomy of man, and who do not scruple to avow practices which are not only not named, but I believe seldom conceived, in England.' The morality here assigned to Lord Byron's associates, and by implication to himself also, is perhaps no more than one stage above that of Count Cenci himself. That Shelley could ever afterwards enjoy the society and acknowledge the friendship of the man of whom he had cause to write in these terms is only to be accounted for on the ground that with a disproportionate sense of the superiority of Byron's genius compared with his own, he was destitute of that robust manly passion that would have made the subject of such strictures, if true, an object of detestation and loathing.

porary with him felt this in some uncertain way, though they could not realize it, and their slanderous accusations of licentiousness were the inapt and shameful speech in which their vague feeling expressed itself.





THE QUARRELS OF CRITICS.

DISCERNING readers of the extracts given in foregoing chapters will not be betrayed by the unanimity of censure which they exhibit into supposing that there was harmony among the critics themselves. Reviewers who were at one in condemning Wordsworth and in reviling Shelley were assuredly not brought into closer sympathy by that circumstance ; but the accident of disagreement as to the merits of a poet furnished occasion for the bitterest feud. It says much for the hold that literature had on the public mind in the first years of the century that the long-continued and singularly acrimonious controversies appearing constantly in the periodical press, touching the treatment of authors by critics, could be tolerated and even enjoyed. An important part of the 'Noctes Ambrosianæ' is concerned with the delinquencies of the *Edinburgh Review* in this particular. One of the features of the *Examiner* was an examination of the reviews of books published in the *Quarterly Review*. The *Literary Gazette* kept an eye always open for the shortcomings of its weekly,

monthly, and quarterly rivals; and even the father of modern critical literature, the *Edinburgh Review* itself, notwithstanding its protestations of superiority to all publications not considered deserving or susceptible of argumentative treatment, was liable to condescend sometimes to revile those 'insects in letters' which stung it by detecting its errors. The most amusing of these quarrels of critics gravitate, as might be expected, about *Blackwood's Magazine*, and not the least ludicrous feature of the critical diatribes of that vivacious periodical is its frank treatment of critics as a class. In 1822 *Blackwood* said :

'Diogenes took a lantern in his hand, and sought all over Athens for an honest man. If he had found one, I know his first question would have been, 'Is not this a world full of humbug?' and the honest man's answer must have been 'Yes, truly, Diogenes; and you, with your tub and your lantern, are the finest piece of humbug in the whole of it.' Now, in regard to the professional critics of the present day, it appears to me that any given number of their sect resembles very much Diogenes strolling up and down the town with his dark lantern in his hand, exclaiming against *humbug*, and trying to pass himself off upon the women and children crossing the streets as a person in pursuit of *honesty*. . . . What is the opinion of the *Quarterly Review* upon any given subject? It is possible that it may be the opinion of *nobody*: at the very best, it is the opinion of Mr. Southey, or of Mr. (another person, who must be pleased,) Gifford himself. . . . Suppose for a moment such a book as Pope's "Dunciad" were to be published to-morrow, Mr. Southey, even though he did not find himself mentioned in it, would infallibly toss up his nose and pronounce it the work of a man of no imagination—no originality—no poetry. Mr. Gifford would not in his heart like it, because he would feel, after reading two full pages, that it was all over with his "Baviad and Mæviad." How would this work be reviewed in the *Quarterly*? . . . It would not be reviewed by Mr. Gifford, because Mr. Gifford, though not at all delighted with the book, could not for

his life be blind to its merits ; and although he might also have many private reasons for not wishing to speak the truth, I do the splenetic Mr. Gifford the justice to say, that I do not believe he is capable of sitting down gravely to write in his own person what he feels to be untrue.

‘ Mr. Southey would receive the book at Keswick by his next mail-coach parcel, and I think he might very possibly set about reviewing it. But then he would speak such utter nonsense about it, that Mr. Gifford would not hear of its being inserted. . . . This is, however, a very unfair way of putting the thing ; for few things are less likely than the appearance of a “Dunciad” in an age when there is so little besides duncery. There is no need of imagining or supposing anything. Just look at what is, and you will be satisfied. Look for example at Mr. Milman, writing three or four articles every year in the *Quarterly*, and, for his pains, having one article in the year written in praise of himself by some friend of his own. Look at Mr. Mitchell writing two dissertations on “Aristophanes” in the *Quarterly Review* : and then turn to the next number of the *Quarterly*, and see Mr. Mitchell praised through thirty pages (no matter how justly and deservedly) for a translation of “Aristophanes,” to which these very dissertations of his have been prefixed. See Reginald Heber writing regularly in the Review, and his poetry—Reginald Heber’s pretty college-prize poetry—quoted—absolutely quoted, in the *Quarterly Review*. Look at Reginald Heber puffing Robert Southey, and Robert Southey puffing Reginald Heber. Look at authors dedicating their books to Mr. Gifford, and Mr. Gifford reviewing their books either by himself or by his true legitimate vassals—his nameless knol-headed templars and curates ! . . . Look at Mr. Brougham, who has lived, in a great measure, for twenty years of his life, by writing in the *Edinburgh Review*, and see with what face he can bear to hear the *Edinburgh Review* puffing him as the immortal statesman and legislator of the age. See the radical *Examiner* praising the borough-mongering *Edinburgh Review*, and the Pope-worshipping *Edinburgh Review* praising the little painted crockery-pots of Mr. Leigh Hunt. See Hazlitt writing in the *Edinburgh Review*, and Hazlitt praised in the *Edinburgh Review*. See Wordsworth quizzed in the *Edinburgh Review*, and Keats and Cornwall patted on the back in it. Poor Keats ! I cannot pass his name without saying that I really think he had

some genius about him. I do think he had something that might have ripened into fruit, had he not made such a mumbling work of the buds—something that might have been wine, and tasted like wine, if he had not kept dabbling with his fingers in the vat, and pouring it out and calling so lustily for quaffers, before the grounds had time to be settled, or the spirit to be concentrated, or the flavour to be formed.’

In much of this trenchant criticism *Blackwood* was assuredly on safe ground, and only its own equally obvious delinquencies in precisely similar directions qualified the effect of its just and spirited strictures in the ‘Noctes’ (xl. 1828), when it complained of the inconsistency of the *Edinburgh*; when it exposed the absurdity of saying that the poetry of Crabbe and Scott was fuller of ‘real persons, intelligible interests, and conceivable incidents’ than any poetry except Shakspeare’s in the language; when it is said that Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge had little chance of being remembered; or when it reminded the Review that had taken credit to itself for the recognition of Keats, that it had praised the poet somewhat tardily, and had ignored altogether the finest products of his genius. The attitude adopted by *Blackwood* towards the most powerful and the most immediate of its rivals can best be seen in the following passages quoted from the volume for 1823:

‘But before I quit for ever the topic of J. Keats, let me ask Mr. Jeffrey one short and simple question. His Review says, that John’s “*fine fancy and powerful invention* were too obvious to be treated with *neglect*,” and that, therefore, the Tory critics set to abusing John. The question I wish to put is this—If Keats’ fancy and invention were so wonderfully obvious, why did the *Edinburgh Review* take no notice at all of the possessor

until long after the Tory critics had had such abundance of time to make minced meat of him? What is the use of a Review, if it be not to watch for the appearance of fine fancy and powerful invention; and, whenever such qualities make their appearance, to call upon the world to give the new poet his due reception of applause? The *Edinburgh Review*, however, suffered all the fancy and invention of Johnny Keats to be puffed in the periodical works, of which its familiar knowledge is now confessed—and to be sneered at in those its fearful intimacy with which is the main-spring and sole inspiring principle of the article before us—it suffered all this for many long years, before it had the honesty or the courage to say one syllable about the existence of such a being as Johnny. How is Mr. Jeffrey to answer or account for this? . . . Why up to this blessed hour has the *Edinburgh Review* never hinted that there has been such a man in the world as Percy Bysshe Shelley? Surely, surely his fancy and invention were in the proportion of 1000 to 1 compared with those of Johnny Keats. Surely, surely he was abused by the *Quarterly*, fully as bitterly as ever Keats was. But no—there is a reason for everything. Shelley, with all his faults, was a gentleman, a scholar, and a poet; and his merits as such were uniformly acknowledged in *Blackwood's Magazine*. That work, if there was a cry against Shelley, did not join it. On the contrary, it was in that work that he was *first* praised in a style worthy of his genius; and, while many severe criticisms appeared there, of and concerning his bad principles, political and religious, there never appeared one word which Shelley, or the friends of Shelley, could complain of, as either illiberal or indecorous towards the man or towards the poet. In a word, the *Edinburgh Review* neglected his fine qualities, however obvious, and *Blackwood* praised them warmly and zealously, in spite of his bad qualities, however obvious. But it did not suit Mr. Jeffrey to allude to all this. Why?—why simply because the object of this article was to denounce all the Tory critics, and *Blackwood's* in particular, as persons who bestow their praise or censure entirely on political grounds—who were incapable of doing justice to the fine fancy and powerful invention of Johnny Keats, and Leigh Hunt, King of the Cockneys, because these men were, or were supposed to be, politically opposed to their own principles. The least mention of Mr. Shelley's very different treatment must have

at once nullified all this nonsense. It must, at the same time, have given birth to a universal inquiry as to the reasons which have from the beginning, and up to this moment, kept the *Edinburgh Review* silent as to Mr. Shelley himself, his poetry, and the evil and the good so strangely blended in all his extraordinary productions. It must have set everybody a-saying, 'Why did this Review, that praises Mr. Barry Cornwall, and Mr. Beddoes, and Mr. Knowles, and heaven knows how many more of such small deer, why did it, why does it, never mention the existence of such poems as "The Revolt of Islam" and "The Cenci"?'

It may be remarked in passing that while it was natural enough that *Blackwood* should complain in 1823 that Shelley had not been reviewed in the pages of the *Edinburgh*, it was a little ludicrous that it should repeat the complaint in 1828 ('Noctes' xl.), after the Review in question had devoted an article to Shelley's 'Posthumous Poems' (1824), and—which makes the slip more silly—after *Blackwood* had published a letter to Barry Cornwall in reply to that very article, attributing it to him. But, indeed, the memory of certain of these critics appears to have been eminently accommodating, and as much at the bidding of will as were the emotional susceptibilities of our familiar friend the worshipper at the church who accounted for the phenomenon of his being unmoved throughout a pathetic sermon that suffused the congregation with tears, by explaining that he did not belong to the parish. How *Blackwood* reconciled its preachments with its practice is a question which we must perforce leave enshrouded in the mystery that envelops it. Perhaps it thought that in order to guard its own preserves it was only necessary to make a sufficient show

of cutting itself off from all that surrounded it. In that case it much resembled the gentleman who built his garden wall higher so as to keep out the rooks. But those full-throated birds found it possible to make their cawings heard, and their offensive presence felt. Hazlitt, whose distinction it was, according to Byron, to talk pimples—‘red and white corruptions discharging nothing but their own humours’—constantly depreciated *Blackwood* by saying that no man who had any regard to his own character would even so much as mention the name of Maga. To this decidedly illogical criticism *Blackwood* was wont to reply that as Hazlitt had not written a paper of any kind for ten years without using, with many unnecessary liberties, Maga’s name, therefore Hazlitt was a man who had no regard to his own character. It was a good syllogism: ‘You hae him on the hip there, sir.’ The most amusing controversy arising out of *Blackwood’s* delinquencies did not, however, originate with Hazlitt. In October, 1818, there appeared in Edinburgh an anonymous pamphlet, entitled ‘Hypocrisy Unveiled and Calumny Detected.’ This was a bitter attack on *Blackwood*, in the persons of Wilson and Lockhart. A manuscript note (initialled H. C.) in a copy at the British Museum, says the tract was the work of two excellent persons who were afterwards Professors in two Universities. In the Halkett-Laing catalogue of anonymous publications (a good authority), the tract is entered as by ‘James Grahame, Advocate.’ The work is entirely without merit either as an exposure of the bad wit and deep malice of *Blackwood*, or as a panegyric on the

good sense and high justice of the *Edinburgh*. That it was not likely to clear the atmosphere of the critical pestilence that pervaded it, and was not calculated to do the art of poetry much good, is obvious from the following foolish paragraph :

‘We may also add, as a summing up of their wretched inconsistencies, that the same writer [who inveighed with so much bitterness against the poem of “*Rimini*”] or at least his sworn brother, the Leopard, has praised Byron’s “*Parisina*,” and Coleridge’s “*Christabel*”—poems which sin as heinously against purity and decency as it is well possible to imagine.’

Allusion of this kind to ‘*Christabel*’ ought to have been enough to laugh the anonymous critic or critics out of court, whatever the justice of their other accusations. Yet this silly scurrility came, in the first instance, out of the *Examiner*, and probably originated with the man who talked red and white corruptions. One further quotation from the tract must suffice :

‘The leading features of this Magazine, then, will be allowed by all to be matchless impudence and a total want of principle. . . . Calumny is constantly in the mouths of its conductors. . . . All the privacies of life are ransacked, all the sanctuaries of our nature explored and violated for the purpose of feeding an insatiate and depraved appetite for scandal and detraction. . . . the two principal writers . . . have employed in turns the florid, the prurient and the obscure style. . . . The first, we are told, in “*Martinus Scriblerus*” is gaudy, like the lowest vegetables which abound at the bottom of ponds and ditches.’

The most pointed references are made to the published and acknowledged works of Wilson and Lockhart, the former being alluded to as the Scorpion, the latter as the Leopard. The noise occasioned by this puerile effort is of itself proof enough to what a depth

of personal malignancy criticism had been allowed to descend. Each of the two men pointed at wrote to the anonymous author demanding his name and address, that he might 'send a friend' to deliver his opinion of his critic's character, and 'to settle time and place' for a meeting at which he might expect satisfaction for the public insults that had been offered him.

The author replied to each of them in these terms :

'If you *be not* the principal conductor or supporter of the *Blackwood's Magazine* ; if you be not the author of a most abusive attack on your friend Mr. W— ; if you be not the traducer of Mr. Playfair, Mr. Hazlitt and Mr. Coleridge ; if you be not the writer of one or other of the letters addressed in the name of "Z" to Mr. Leigh Hunt, and if you did not take shelter under a quotation from Junius, and submit to be publicly stigmatized by him as a coward and a scoundrel—then you have nothing to say to me. But if all or any of these things apply to you, in that case you have lost every claim to the character of a gentleman, and have no right whatever to demand satisfaction.'

In short the quarrel may be dramatically summarized as follows : 'Hypocrisy Unveiled' to Wilson and Lockhart : 'You are a pair of scoundrels !' W. and L. : 'Then fight us !' 'H. U.' : 'No, if you're not scoundrels I don't want to fight you ; and if you are, you are not to be fought.'

A more ludicrous example of deliberate bullying and of cowardly backing out of what were supposed to be the just consequences of bullying could hardly be found in fact or fiction. After this let us not set too high a value on the invention of Sheridan in bringing together the fire-eating Sir Lucius O'Trigger and the intrepid Bob Acres. Surely the 'Rivals'

must have had many rivals in Edinburgh about 1818. It may be noted that in that year Mr. Blackwood also distinguished himself in a fresh field. A letter from him appears in the *Courant* about a quarrel with a man named Douglas, and the consequent horsewhipping of that person. Who was Douglas? Had he anything to do with 'Hypocrisy Unveiled'? Was he the printer? or a bookseller who sold the tract extensively? Mr. Blackwood seems to have felt proud of his powers on this occasion, and small wonder that he did, for his enemies frequently taunted him by saying that having finished his customary sermon he usually 'retired to count his money, his ribaldry, and his kicks.*' When in 1818 John Murray undertook the publication of *Maga* in London, the *Examiner* said, 'You, Mr. John Murray, now publish the work of a convicted libeller! . . . a horsewhipped bookseller in Edinburgh!!!' It may be supposed that where the critics of the press enjoyed to the full that privilege of a free state of talking and publishing any kind of nonsense, and of indulging and exhibiting any degree of Warburtonian arrogance, their quarrels were confined to literature. Not so, however; the implements of warfare were by no means limited to the grey goose-quill. In the settlement of all matters of personal contention, it is curious how slight is the change in our manners during the past thousand years. In earlier days the knight who published a damaging accusation against a man of equal rank expected to be called upon to prove his statement by

* Leigh Hunt.

his sword. If he conquered in the fight, his accusation was proclaimed to be true ; but if he were vanquished, and desired to live, he confessed that his accusation was false, whereupon he was pronounced a base traitor, and his possessions were forthwith confiscated. It was hardly a judicial method of testing the absolute truth of an injurious allegation, but it was a summary and decisive one. The same merit, and no other, can be claimed for the method of settlement resorted to by such recent disputants as Jeffrey and Moore, Blackwood and Douglas, Wilson, Lockhart, and the author of 'Hypocrisy Unveiled.' Now that duelling is neither legal nor fashionable, we adopt another method which has more apparent than actual points of difference. By the time one of our actions for libel has come to a close the public has usually arrived at the conclusion that where so much mud has been thrown on every side it is impossible to say where it does not stick. The old style of settling grievances was more decisive, and perhaps as frequently just.

The cavils of the critics were always most amusing when they proceeded from the northern metropolis, or were directed towards it ; but the cavils of the critics in London were only less entertaining because only less frantically irrational, or less distinguished by the hysterical note of tragedy that rises to the screech of farce. The most notable of these were the quarrels of the *Examiner* and *Quarterly Review*. Gifford, the editor of the latter periodical, began his career by publishing a satire (referred to in foregoing

extracts) entitled 'Baviad and Mæviad,' intended to exterminate an ephemeral race of poetasters generated by a Mr. Merry, one of the Academy of Della Crusca. It is amusing to note that Leigh Hunt began his career by publishing a similar satire entitled 'The Feast of the Poets,' intended to extol great poets like Wordsworth, at the cost of small critics, foremost among whom was Gifford, whose single recommendation in the eyes of the satirist was that he once fell with effect on the plague of poetic butterflies just mentioned. Surely Fate must have enjoyed a broad grin in anticipation of the time near at hand when the 'small critic' in question was to fall on Hunt himself as founder of a second college of Della Cruscans. The 'Feast' gave rise to some of the most inveterate enmities the author experienced, and convinced him of the folly of a young writer's commencing his career with satire. But Hunt was so far from regretting his participation in that field of warfare that as late as 1823 he published the satire entitled 'Ultra-Crepidarius,' exclusively devoted to William Gifford. Hunt's preface to this production is certainly a satisfying proof that where 'prosperous insincerity' was the subject of assault, he could 'roar you as gently as any sucking dove,' yea, 'roar you an 'twere any nightingale.'

'The person who crawled for his portrait in the following sketch, has no excuse for the malignity of his very mediocre pretensions and slavish success. He is no inexperienced youth ; nor is he poor in his old age. He has grown grey, yet he has not grown wiser. He has endured sickness and melancholy, yet they have not made him humane. The young he has treated as

if he never wanted encouragement himself, nor found it. The delicate of health he has not spared, though his own hand shook that struck them.'

Gifford had perhaps a still more implacable enemy in Hazlitt. On one occasion the *Quarterly*, in reviewing some strictures of Hazlitt's on Henry VIII., set them aside with this exalted brevity: 'We need not answer this gabble.' An argumentative disputation would probably have pleased Hazlitt, however severely he might have been censured for his opinion; but this summary sneer whipped him up to the rage of a bull that is mad with the tossing of a red rag from the safe ambush of the right side of a strong fence. Like Shelley, he could have enjoyed the heaven of praise or the hell of censure, but the purgatory of indifference was too much for him. He addressed a long letter to Gifford, in which he said:

'You are the *Government Critic*, a character nicely differing from that of a Government spy—the invisible link that connects literature with the police . . . you do well to confine yourself to the hypocrite, for you have too little talent for the sophist.'

This was the language of the man who spent his youth in the circle of the 'Lake' poets, and who afterwards bitterly assailed Coleridge, offering as excuse the unquestionable circumstance that in politics his old friends had changed sides—not he—and had become the associates of men who had slandered them and him. Truly Keats was right when he said, 'Hazlitt is your only good damner,' though the poet missed the pleasure anticipated in the further remark, 'If ever I am damned I should like him to damn

me.' The readers who from any cause fail to look closely at these quarrels of critics will probably be puzzled to know where the right lay, and where the wrong, or will perhaps hastily conclude that where so much abuse was exchanged on every side, there was neither right only nor wrong only discoverable anywhere. The writer of this book has performed his task imperfectly if—without deliberately taking sides—he has left any doubt as to the direction which sympathy may properly take when guided by an adequate knowledge of the facts and by a competent judgment.

In 1823 the *Edinburgh* published an article on the 'Periodical Press of Britain,' dealing very frankly with its daily and weekly contemporaries. *Blackwood* attributed the article to Hazlitt, and the *Literary Gazette* gave it the same ascription. The following passages on the *Times* may serve as a taste of the quality of the whole :

'The *Times* newspaper is, we suppose, entitled to the character it gives itself, of being the "Leading Journal of Europe," and is perhaps the greatest engine of temporary opinion in the world. Still it is not to our taste—either in matter or manner. It is pompous, dogmatical, and full of pretensions ; but neither light, various, nor agreeable. . . . But the *Times* conforms to the changes of the time. It takes up no falling cause ; fights no uphill battle ; advocates no great principle ; holds out a helping hand to no oppressed or obscure individual. It is "ever strong upon the stronger side." Its style is magniloquent ; its spirit is not magnanimous. It is valiant, swaggering, insolent, with a hundred thousand readers at its heels ; but the instant the rascal rout turn round with the "whiff and wind" of some fell circumstance, the *Times*, the renegade, inconstant *Times*, turns with them ! Let the mob shout, let the city roar.

and the voice of the *Times* is heard above them all, with outrageous deafening clamour ; but let the vulgar hubbub cease, and no whisper, no echo of it is ever after heard of in the *Times*. Like Bully Bottom in the play, it then "aggravates its voice so, as if it were a singing dove, an it were any nightingale." Its coarse ribaldry is turned to a harmless jest ; its swelling rhodomontade sinks to a vapid commonplace ; and the editor amuses himself in the interval, before another great explosion, by collecting and publishing from time to time, affidavits of the numbers of his paper sold in the last stormy period of the press.'

In view of so much disagreement among the critics themselves, the question naturally arises, 'Is periodical criticism beneficial to literature?' The *Edinburgh* frankly replies by describing in the following terms the function of the critic :

'We want another Osmyn to burn and spare not—and then the work of extermination and the work of regeneration would go on kindly together. . . Who is there that can read all those books with which the modern press teems, and which, did they not daily disappear and turn to dust, the world would not be able to contain them? Are we to blame for despatching the most worthless of these from time to time, or of abridging the process of getting at the marrow of others, and thus leaving the learned at leisure to contemplate the time-hallowed relics, as well as the ephemeral productions of literature?'

According to the *Edinburgh* of 1823, criticism was a sort of filter ; according to the *Edinburgh* of 1802, it was, as we have seen, a sort of police sergeant ; according to the periodical press of our own time, it is a sort of tourney in which critics and authors may be both combatants and judges : in which a man may first disport himself in the lists, and afterwards mount the dais and forthwith adjudicate on his rivals. How far periodical criticism promotes or retards the in-

terests of real literature is a question not easy to answer. There is the important fact that German literature was built upon German criticism ; that the Germans had learned to form a judgment upon the literature of other nations before they began to have a literature of their own. Whether it was of the first consequence that Lessing and Kant were older than Goethe is not so easy to determine as may at first sight appear. In reply to the pertinent question of whether Shakspeare could have written as he did had he lived in the present century, it is not enough to point to Scott and Shelley, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Tennyson and George Eliot as a large refutation of the assertion that the effects of criticism are chilling and blighting to original genius. It is true that these writers sprang up in the very hot-bed of criticism, but there is the fact that they kept themselves rigidly aloof from its influence (at least during the years of active production), while Shakspeare was a man of the world, constantly going in and out among men of many classes, busily engaged in the business of life, compelled to participate in some small measure in nearly every passing form of intellectual activity. In a secondary sense, Shakspeare could no more have isolated himself by main force from the whole current of feeling in his time than Raleigh could have done so, or even Essex. It was well for him that his age was a healthy one : that it had none of the flabby tameness on the one hand, and the feverish fidgetiness on the other, which are the great misfortunes of our time. Shelley, in his letter to the editor of the

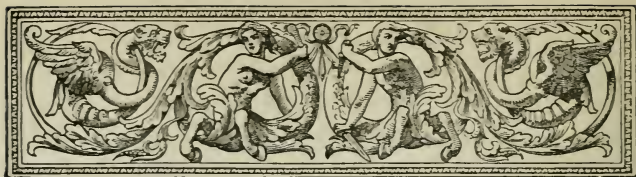
Quarterly Review touching the attack on Keats, says 'contemptuousness of phraseology' is one of the chilling effects on genius from which 'it is difficult for a critic to abstain.' The poet's own experience was liable to lead him to that conclusion, although it is only the arrogant, and usually the ignorant, critic who finds it necessary to have recourse to this species of wet blanket. But the temper of nineteenth-century criticism has been of a kind very injurious to the growth of those works that must ripen quietly, if they are to ripen at all. On some minds the mere presence of journals in which a writer's doings are certain to be canvassed must have distracting and therefore injurious effects. Think of Rembrandt, whom the *Edinburgh* instances, living as he did in the retirement of his sumptuous cell of gorgeous light and shade; his eye gazing on the dazzling gloom and asking no other object; think of him there producing one after one his wonderful works, removed equally from the low, petty vanities incident to a newspaper puff, and from the disturbing influences of an attack in a weekly journal. Then think of him living, as he did not, in a brilliant saloon, coquetting with fifty accomplishments, coming down in the morning to read the notice of his last picture in the morning paper, or turning from his easel in the evening to glance feverishly for his name in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Think of the heroic Luther in the Warteburg burning his midnight lamp over some obscure text in the Vulgate, where he sees the machinations of the evil one designed to lead the ignorant astray — think of him, filled with fierce

defiances of the arch-fiend, with whom he believes himself called to do battle, actually seeing in his vivid imagination the tempter rise up before him, and in a struggle of rage literally hurling the ink-pot at the phantom. Then think of him sitting in a conclave of reformers, eagerly watching for personal slanders, and hurling his ink-pot in another sense at a malevolent critic. Or think of Rousseau in his melancholy solitude, in his suspicion of conspirators lurking everywhere about him—Rousseau, ‘shy of light as the mole, and as quick-eared for every whisper of public opinion’—think of him living in an age of critical journals, and stopping the flood of his serious and vehement eloquence to retort upon a personal calumniator.

Is it necessary to ask which of these two is the atmosphere in which the work of a great artist, whether of the pen or pencil, could best thrive? There is another side to the shield, however, and we must not swear to the brass until we have looked upon the silver also. Periodical literature is, by virtue of its existence, a witness to the interest taken in letters. Interest of any kind, good or bad, is stimulating to creative genius; indifference or vapid applause kills it, unless these can be forgotten in calm, serene confidence in the interest and intelligent applause of posterity. What, for example, would prompt a poet to publish (he may produce from higher motives) a poem elaborated to the utmost perfection in an extremely difficult measure, if he knew that it would be read by persons unable to distinguish between good

measure and bad? Now the true criticism which creates a state of society, an atmosphere, in which works of genius are certain of recognition, in which rules and forms of composition and all on which the highest beauty of human speech depends, are observed and cherished, must be of the greatest importance to literature, because highly conducive to its triumphs. It gives the man of genius dash and daring to know that he will be known, to feel that what he may do will not escape notice, when he is triumphing over difficulties in order to obey law, or when he is transgressing and can be applauded, though known to be transgressing. But criticism, if it is to reach this ultimate standard of usefulness to literature, must be something more or other than it has often been in England. It must be practised with more knowledge and with more sympathy. These were the two elements—knowledge and sympathy—which two great critics of fifty years ago could not find in the criticism of their time. Coleridge maintained that no method of critical investigation could be fair and philosophical which did not rest on a code of laws, that code to be independent of all foreseen application to particular authors and works. Goethe maintained that no opinion of any writings could be worth having unless it came from a certain one-sided enthusiasm, namely, that sympathy and enjoyment in what we see, which was in his opinion the only reality. It is doubtful if the readers of this book will be easily able, in the face of the extracts here printed, to take either view alone. The grave blunders into which English

critics of 1800-1825 too often fell, were largely the direct result of a too rigid adherence to a code of laws. True, it was a narrow code, and was founded on the authors and works of one period only. It may be said for the critics who were slaves to such conventionalities that even their mistakes rose out of a jealousy of the honour of literature ; that they knew the current canons of composition and held themselves bound to defend them against innovation ; that this was a healthy and indeed honourable feeling on their part, and that they kept up the interest of the world in literature. It may farther be contended that even faulty laws are better than no laws, for where there are no laws there are no transgressions, and where there are no transgressions there is no vital interest, and nobody cares what anybody does either for the elevation or the degradation of letters, and nobody is offended or pleased. On the other hand, it may be questioned if sympathy is more than a part of what goes to make salutary criticism. Sympathy without law would be apt to let criticism blow off with the two-and-thirty winds in two-and-thirty different directions, according as the several idiosyncrasies of different critics might determine. There would be a universal allowing of every man to say just what he liked, and none to take notice of him. All standards of taste in style would go down in the general submersion of all law.



CONCLUSION.

WE have reached the end of our extracts from the periodical literature of the first quarter of the century, and but little is left to say. Numerous as are the critiques from which we have quoted, we are conscious that more remain unnoticed. Indeed, it is not improbable that bibliographers, who have from time to time dipped into volumes of old magazines with a view to the elucidation of this point or that touching the early reception of conspicuous works, may find that no mention has been made of articles which seem to them to be the most notable examples of the kind sought after. The author will be content if upon investigation of the entire subject it appear that he has brought within the limits of a reasonable compilation a body of representative excerpts, sufficient to convey an adequate idea of public opinion at the period dealt with, and calculated by aid of the explanatory remarks that are interwoven to throw light on the whole matter at issue. In the collecting of passages it has sometimes been difficult to know exactly what to include, and

what to withhold, where all have been characterized by qualities equally likely to act as a witness and warning against false principles and ungenerous impulses ; but when a doubt has arisen as to which of two articles of kindred tone and temper (but from different sources) to cite as representative of current criticism, the author has ultimately adopted (other things being equal) the article published in the better-remembered of the two periodicals. Hence, as Shelley specialists will observe, he has given prominence to the *Quarterly Review*, where the *Literary Gazette* might sometimes have served his purpose almost as well.

It will be seen that no attempt has been made to affix the names of individual authors to the anonymous articles from which passages have been quoted. In one or two cases names have certainly been mentioned, and in other cases they have been hinted at ; but this uninvincible literary ascription has been done only where the secrets are notoriously 'open secrets,' and where it would be affectation to pretend ignorance of accredited identifications with which most readers are familiar. But where an author has neither claimed an article by reproducing it in his collected works, nor had it claimed for him by his biographer, it has been considered sufficient to attribute it simply to the journal or review in which it first appeared, and whose opinion it was made by virtue of its anonymous publication. And this course has been adopted after mature consideration.

Carrying the mind forward from the time when the author of the book first conceived the idea of collecting these anomalies of criticism until now, when he has at length compiled and annotated them, he cannot but be interested to observe the change of feeling that he has experienced with respect to them. In common with most readers he had been conscious in some indefinite way that contemporary criticism on what were called the Lake and Cockney Poets had been hostile, unreasonable, and short-sighted; but a full realization of the measure of that hostility, too often venomous, spiteful, barbarous and brutal, came upon him with a surprise and shock to which no words could have given utterance that had not been, as much as the articles in question, open to the extremest charge of reckless assault and unbridled ill-nature. He trusts he had outgrown this period of uncharitableness before beginning to write, and that the book to which this final word is being appended is reasonably moderate as to temper. It is not unlikely that the examples of criticism herein unearthed may excite more indignation among professional critics of the press (who might be expected to look jealously to the credit of their craft) than among the general public, who might, out of sympathy, not to say propinquity, with their forefathers (whose antipathies and predilections they must in some measure, though unconsciously, have inherited), be forgiven for resenting the misleading of their professed guides. But critics themselves know best of all how easy it is to fall into errors only less serious than those here ex-

hibited, and that, too, without the criminal intervention of mean or unlawful motives. It is so very easy to persuade one's self that a book is good where one's personal sympathies are engaged on behalf of the author, and so much easier still to persuade one's self that a book is bad where the reverse of this is the case, that it does not require the exercise of any conscious special pleading—the result of friendship and interest—or malicious battery of assault—the outgrowth of positive dislike or literary or political antipathy—to lead one into painful mistakes of judgment. Any honest critic may realize the extent to which a conscientious critical intellect is, without knowing it, subservient to influences outside itself, by glancing at his reviews written on the work, say, of a quondam associate who has ceased to be such from circumstances quite apart from any that can operate directly on a literary friendship. It is not less than painful in such a case to perceive how much of all that was said in praise of a book's merits was unconsciously heightened by personal regard, and how much of all that was said in extenuation of defects, or withheld in the enumeration of characteristics, was influenced by similar forces of friendliness or esteem. And if this is so where the kindlier feelings are enlisted, why may not the reverse of it be susceptible of explanation on similar grounds? After putting by a good deal of obvious, and no doubt to some extent irresistible and justifiable thought, as to the effects of conscious and deliberate malice and envy (the cancer of literary fellowship), may we not set down

some of the blundering to which these extracts bear melancholy witness, to sheer, palpable and honest short-sightedness, ignorance and stupidity? Much of it is manifestly attributable to one other cause, namely, the difficulty of escaping from ancient and approved but outworn canons of taste; and whenever it has seemed possible to advance a charitable plea based on this fact, an effort has been made to do so. All things taken together, the author is disposed to assign these erroneous abridgments of the judgment of time not to evil motives entirely, or ignorance entirely, or false principles entirely, but partly to each of these, and partly, no doubt, to causes no longer explicable and long since inoperative.

In reading this body of hostile criticism on Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge, Byron, Hunt, Keats, and Shelley, we naturally ask what the effects of it may have been upon the poets themselves. Those effects were various. 'If the quantity of time,' says Wordsworth, 'consumed in writing critiques on the works of others, were given to original composition, of whatever kind it might be, it would be much better employed; it would make men sooner find their own level, and it would do infinitely less mischief. . . . The writers in these publications while they prosecute their inglorious employment cannot be supposed to be in a state of mind very favourable for being affected by the finer influences of a thing so pure as genuine poetry.' Southey was at all times restive under criticism, as the author who is also a professional critic is almost invariably found to be. Coleridge was about as in-

different to criticism as any conspicuous writer of his time. 'I have not,' he says, 'cheated myself into mistaking a weak stomach for strength of mind, nor made a merit of an indifference which it is a misfortune to feel, and the sickliest vanity to affect.' 'As for my unfriends the Edinburgh Reviewers,' he continues, 'the object of their articles is to prevent or retard the sale of a work, and this they seem to pursue with most inveteracy where, from the known circumstances of the author, the injury will fall heaviest. . . . Still the injury is such as ought not to affect, directly at least, the heart of a man of genius—though I have heard of one melancholy case, in which a bee from the muses' hive was stung to death by these literary hornets, who, unable to collect honey from the flowers, destroy and deform the fruits. The allegory is more perfect than I intended.'

Byron has left on record a statement of the invigorating effects produced upon him by hostile criticism ; and a friend who knew Leigh Hunt in the mellower years of his life, says he has heard the author of ' Rimini ' say of his critics : ' They did me great wrong, but I feel that I can forgive them.' The ' bee from the muses' hive ' referred to by Coleridge may have been Keats, who nevertheless said that his own domestic criticism had given him pain beyond all endurance greater than any inflicted by the *Quarterly*, and who declared that if *Blackwood* assailed him as it had assailed Hunt, and he should chance to meet the calumniator in any public place, he would reply by the only argument to which the libeller could be ex-

pected to be susceptible—a blow. We remember Shelley's attitude, in one memorable case, towards the critics of the press: 'It may be well said that these wretched men know not what they do. They scatter their insults and their slanders without heed as to whether the poisoned shaft lights on a heart made callous by many blows, or on one composed of more penetrable stuff.'

It is hard to say how criticism ought to be received or what the value may be to an author of a critic's praise and blame. Certain it is that the restiveness under censure which some authors display is hurtful alike to their credit as writers and to their character as men. A measure of anxiety to know what the verdict of the public will be is natural, and no doubt salutary in a young author putting forth his first work. Such an one has satisfied his own judgment that whatever the imperfections of his production, its merit or its chances are on the whole of a kind to justify its publication; and now he is eager to learn how far the world to whom he is an unknown and indifferent quantity will second his own judgment, and, it may be, the judgment of reliable friends. But when he has passed this Rubicon, the anxiety ought surely to be at an end, and no blunders or slanders or sneers should seriously disturb the writer who has once for all established his right to be heard, and who ought to have too large a charity and too true a sense of the infirmities of human nature to expect only virtue and wisdom in quarters where vice and folly are as likely to find play. There is, however, another view that may

reasonably be taken. It may be said that with an author's first success, his stake in the world of literature begins; that he has then acquired a tangible property in current fame which may be turned into actual money, and which—whatever the use made of it—he has a right to protect from assault; that with each succeeding success acquired in the upward march of reputation, that property becomes the greater, and its responsibility the more serious. And this being so, it may be urged that an author does well to concern himself about the doings of those marauders who, however despicable in themselves, and however unlikely to profit by their robberies, would dispossess him of his honest gains. 'It is all very well,' an author might say, 'to remind me that this man, my traducer, is in himself a poor creature, whose verdicts are valueless, and who lives, perchance, on rumpus; but I have a vested interest in the goodwill and good opinion of the people which this person would take from me by telling the public with oracular dicta, and probably in two hundred thousand copies of a newspaper, that I am a knave who has imposed himself upon their generosity, or a fool who has inflicted himself upon their credulity!' There is force in an objection like this to whatever optimist doctrine may occur to a mind that has never actually gone through the ordeal described. Indeed, such an objection is only to be met by the contention—made venerable but not impotent by age—that truth in the end will prevail, and that the only conditions under which reflections like those enumerated should be painful are where the subject of

them is self-convicted of error, and knows that in truth he is somewhat of a quack who has built an insecure popularity on the quicksands of some passing delusion.

Restiveness under censure is no doubt a grievous fault, but indifference to applause seems to be almost as serious a failing. We have seen with what dignity of reticence Coleridge regarded the critics who maligned him, reserving the grief with which he read their rhapsodies of insult for the writers themselves and his contempt for their employers. Who shall say that among the forces that operated to keep that poet silent so long, indifference to praise did not fill a foremost place?

‘And would you learn the spells that drowse my soul?
Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And Hope without an object cannot live.’

Coleridge was not alone in this failing; and we may find a fit companion for him where the cursory reader would perhaps look last of all. We have recently heard Keats accused of carrying up into his manhood the hysterical manners of ‘the apothecary’s apprentice;’ we know that at first he suffered much from criticism; that perhaps he died *when* he died largely as the result of ‘labour spurned;’ but he who doubts that Keats—notwithstanding the trace of effeminacy already dwelt upon—had the stuff in him out of which a strong man would one day have been made, should read the following letter, written after the publication and condemnation of ‘*Endymion*.’

‘I am ambitious of doing the world some good: if I should be spared, that may be the work of future years—in the interval

I will assay to reach to as high a summit in poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer. The faint conceptions I have of poems to come bring the blood frequently into my forehead. All I hope is, that I may not lose all interest in human affairs—that the solitary indifference I feel for applause, even from the finest spirits, will not blunt any acuteness of vision I may have. I do not think it will. I feel assured that I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beautiful, even if my night's labours should be burnt every morning, and no eye ever shine upon them.'—To WOODHOUSE, 27th Oct. 1818.

If there is a hint of weakness in this letter it is the weakness of indifferentism. Keats over-rated the potentialities of human nature when he supposed it possible to write from mere love of writing, and without regard for 'applause even from the finest spirits.' That he would have landed himself at length in a varioloid of indifferentism we may easily believe; but this would have contributed to put an end to all effort in his case, as in the case of Coleridge, to whom poetry's 'own exceeding great reward did not furnish that object without which his hope could not live. With truer knowledge of his own heart Wordsworth, who was as indifferent to popular applause as Coleridge was, or as Keats believed he was, deceived himself with no idea that what he did was done to soothe his affliction, to endear his solitude, or to nurture his love of the beautiful. With conscious aim Wordsworth wrote for posterity, and the slings of present fortune were not likely to touch the man who was busied only about his future fate.

And this brings us to a much larger question than can be entered upon here as to the sorts and uses of literary praise and censure. It is only possible to

indicate what is meant. There are widely different temperaments among men of genius. There are those who, dominated by a high ideal with which the outer world has only a remote concern, have the self-command to go on from year to year evolving a life's interest largely within themselves, oblivious of the world's abuse, and, when it comes, indifferent to the world's applause. Of this temperament were Milton and Wordsworth and, most of all, Coleridge. There are others who, fired by the ambition to dominate a great ideal rather than to be dominated by it, have the courage to encounter any measure of open hostility, but succumb instantly under indifference. Of this temperament was Chatterton among those who failed, and Byron among those who succeeded. Again, there are those who labour not from choice but irresistible impulse, and who, if they be poets, must, like Shelley, through foul or fair, praise or censure or neglect, sing as the lark sings, because God has given them the gift of it. One further class of temperament in genius exists, and it is that to which Keats belongs: a temperament alive with almost a girlish sensitiveness to every passing effect of enkindling applause or withering hostility or obliterating indifference: a temperament that needs for its support a responsive sympathy, without which the 'hopes and purposes of genius sink back on the heart, like a sigh on the tightened chest of a sick man:' a temperament that may become morbidly averse to censure in the event of success, or liable to collapse in case of failure. Such—so far as the present writer's observation

enabled him to judge—was the temperament of Rossetti also.

From this point forward a good deal might be said with profit as to the best critical attitude to adopt towards a literary work, in order to obtain the fairest view of it. The popular current theory is that a book may be best criticized by bringing it into juxtaposition with the foremost touchstones of literary excellence, that are nearest related to it in purpose; but in this opinion a great critic is against us. 'Principles of criticism,' says Coleridge (*Blackwood*, September, 1820), 'drawn from philosophy, are best employed to illustrate the works of those whose fame is already a *fatum* among mankind, and to confirm, augment and enlighten our admiration of the same. The *living*, on the other hand, ought always to be appreciated *comparatively*—their works with those of their contemporaries, each in its kind, and in proportion to the kind. We will not equal the wren with the nightingale in song, nor the sparrow with the eagle in flight; but both shall take precedence of the ostrich, who can neither sing nor fly—though he manages his wings so adroitly, and so well helps out his natural prose with his *analogon* of poetic power, as to make no worse speed in the world's eye, and perhaps a greater figure.'

To drop, in a last word or two, the impersonal manner in which this volume is written, I would say that I have been conscious of only one purpose in writing it, that, namely, of doing the arts of poetry and

criticism some good. If I have done my work at all rightly, I have not merely exhibited certain errors of criticism—that would have been the task of the bibliographer—but traced those errors to their source, showing sometimes the conditions that explain, and occasionally the circumstances that palliate them, and that is the function of the critic. Other inferences than mine may be drawn from the facts I put forth. I am prepared to find my adjudications disputed. I offer my conclusions with all moderation of spirit, though not without reasonable deliberation. To trace a writer's career through contemporary records is to read literary history in a new way, and that the most simple and direct. It is the natural accident of our position that in making acquaintance with an author of an earlier generation whose fame is established, we begin at the end and go backward to the beginning. We see Milton after the homage of centuries has been offered him, not while he was the subject of a sneer from Warton. The glory of the great men of the past overshadows the petty trials that vexed them in life, as the broad sea that flows to our feet at the flood leaves no sight of the shoals it has swept over. But we who come later miss the stimulus of friction which would be ours if we could see the obstacles that had to be surmounted. I hardly know why modesty should restrain me from saying that out of a book which strives honestly to present a view of the lives of seven great poets dogged by the feet of envy, malice, selfishness, and most of all of pure

ignorance and simple love of power, the best intelligence now among us that is in any measure the victim of misunderstanding or calumny, need not disdain to gather support and solace. To see how sorely the finest genius cankers amid the rancid breath of controversy, how men of creative powers lose by combativeness, how the voice of discord clamouring at its own echo always in the end shouts itself first hoarse and then silent, ought to help to cultivate the quiet in which alone great work can thrive. Then, on the other hand, to see how critical verdicts the most emphatically enunciated, the most strenuously upheld, have brought about their own speedy reversal, ought to help to beget moderation of opinion and temperance of expression. To the living, this Review of Reviewers will, I trust, be helpful ; but will it be hurtful to the dead ? Surely not. The authors here dealt with are beyond irritation at the touch of an infirmity, and it cannot do them wrong to show where they were believed to be open to attack. The petty passions have subsided that once bore down these great names. Slander is impotent except where it meets with a lover of slander ; and no one now is more disposed to believe the charges of *The Literary Gazette* against Shelley, than those of Salmasius against Milton. This is one of the legacies that the years leave us. Time buries away the worthless and the little out of our sight, for ' Eternity looks through Time,' and only the giant figures of his limitless landscape stand revealed against its light, even as

only the highest headlands stand dipped in the grey of dawn, when the risen sun looks through the fretted clouds behind them, and all the sleeping moorlands lie veiled in mist.



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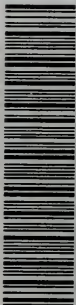
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